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The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Computer Gaming World

SEPTEMBER 1997
NO. 158

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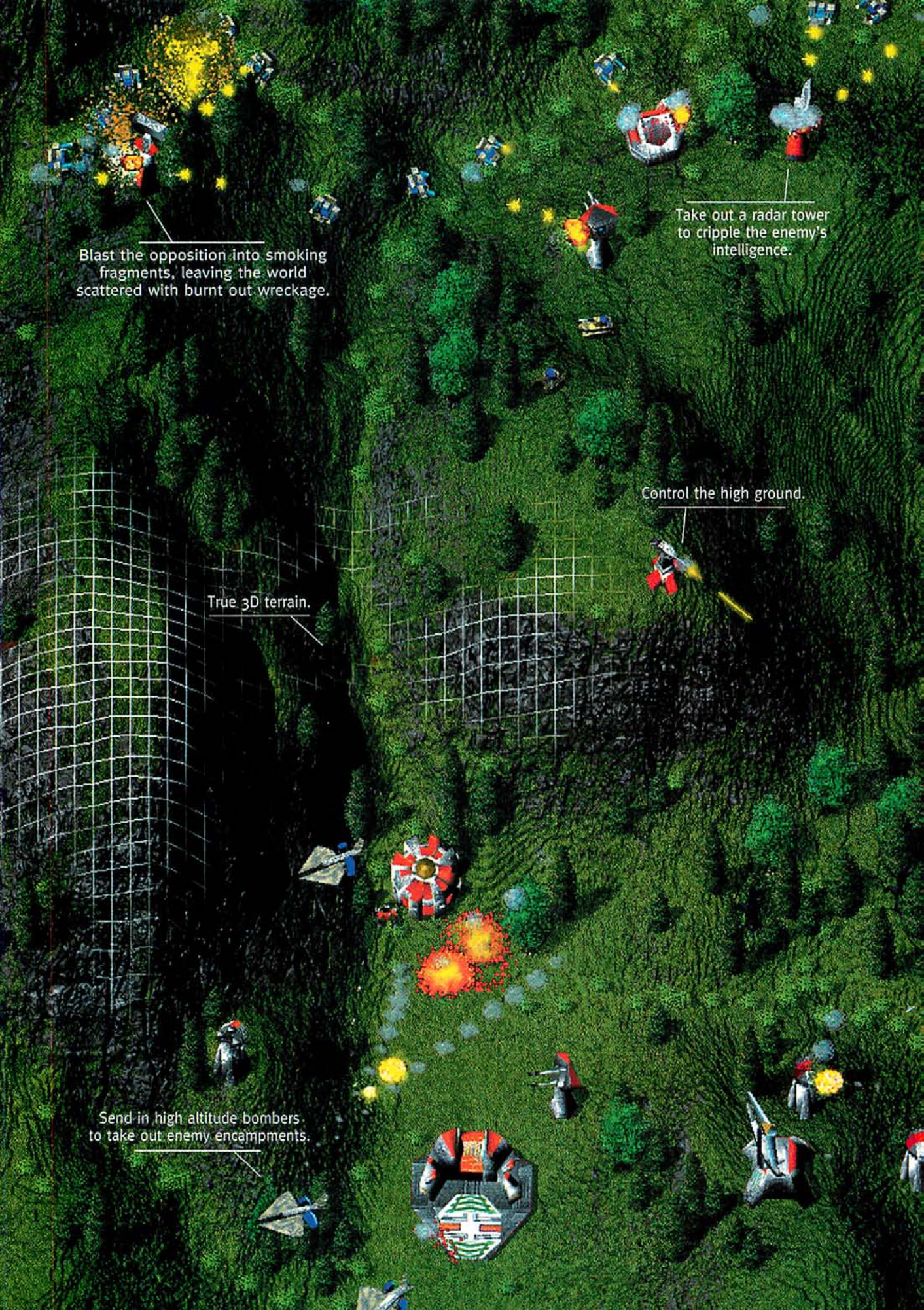
RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #368

★★★★★ **REVIEW • JACK NICKLAUS 4**

CG CHOICE

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Double Eagle

Accolade Drives to Perfection With the Stunning, Deep JACK NICKLAUS 4

By Scott A. May

Dubbed by many as the "golfer of the century," Jack Nicklaus is truly a legend in his own time. So it's only fitting that the latest computer game to bear his name, Accolade's JACK NICKLAUS 4, should be the preeminent golf simulation of our time. Nearly everything you could ever hope for in a golf game is included in this comprehensive package. It's an absolute model of perfection.

PRO SHOP

Here's what you get in JN4 (take a deep breath): five 18-hole courses (Colleton River Plantation, Country Club of the South, Muirfeld Village, Cabo del Sol, and the fictional Winding Springs), eight play styles, a full-blown course designer, a course converter (for importing JNSE courses), and a choice of four multiplayer modes (serial, modem, LAN, and Internet). The only thing missing is post-game cocktails at the clubhouse.

Pre-game options include course, game length, golfing buddies (with updated stats), a choice of caddies, gimmes, mulligans, and weather conditions (rain, fog, or clear). Three of these options can be further defined: clearing fog, maximum distance for gimmes, and total number of mulligans allowed per round.

The real kicker is the variety of available game styles, the most of any golf sim on the market. These include Best Score Championship, Best Score Handicap, Stroke Play, Match Play, Sudden Death, $1 Million Skins Challenge, Bingo Bango Bongo, and Certified Game (recorded Stroke Play for deferred mail or email matchups).

Graphically, JN4 meets or exceeds anything on the market, including Access Software's LINKS LS. Accolade uses a proprietary height-mapping engine to achieve incredible terrain real-

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Roll Your Own



PACKIN' THE TOOLS Everything you need to design new links—or modify existing ones—is at your disposal in JN4's unsurpassed course architect.

In real life, Jack Nicklaus is in semi-retirement, playing only select senior tournaments. Far from inactive, however, St. Nick devotes much of his energy to course designs. To this end, I can't think of a better testament to his architectural prowess than JACK NICLAUS 4's superb course designer. Modeled after Nicklaus Productions' own CAD system, the course architect is amazingly robust.

It can also be daunting, particularly for first-time designers eager to duplicate their favorite links. For this reason, Accolade devotes about two-thirds of the game manual to course design, including tips, tricks, and a step-by-step tutorial. There's also a built-in design wizard, which automates many of the tedious tasks for beginners.

Starting with a flat piece of land, you build your course from the inside out, applying fairway shapes and greens, setting pars and handicaps, and arranging your overall layout with an eye for natural continuity. Next, fine-tune each hole with variations in shape, elevation and terrain type. From there, a plethora of tool palettes are available to customize your basic design: trees, bushes, rocks, bunkers, lakes, streams, cart paths, objects, sky, and horizon. Using CAD-style boundary points, everything on the screen can be moved or resized using simple drag-and-drop mouse commands.

Auto-rendering lets you see in precise detail how your designs will appear during play. Not only that, but every change is instantly updated in the rendering window. Every square foot of your course can be viewed from virtually any distance or angle.

A few faults are readily apparent: There's no option for importing user-created objects or sounds, and no way to automatically tile view windows on the screen. Finally, there's no provision for testing your design as you go, except to save, exit, and load the unfinished course into the game. These detractions aside, however, the course designer is a powerful, versatile tool guaranteed to give this product long legs in the marketplace.

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ism. For the real-world courses, aerial flybys enabled the designers to accurately detect land elevations within six inches of sea level at 1 x 1 foot intervals. The underlying engine then calculates variables such as light source shading, shadows, and reflections, resulting in the most organic-looking terrain I've ever seen. In fact, look closely and you'll see that the terrain even shades itself—proof positive of the game's subtle but utterly mind-blowing attention to detail.

Because golf is such a fast-paced sport—OK, I'm being sarcastic—JN4's screen redraws are markedly quick. Technically, it's incredible, considering that nearly two-thirds of what you see is 3D-rendered terrain, unlike LINKS LS, which relies much more on a 2D painting horizon to fill the screen. Of course, overall speed is still reliant on hardware factors, such as processor speed, system and video RAM, graphic detail, and screen resolution. JN4 rewards gamers with more than 20MB system RAM, and will run at whatever maximum resolution and color depth your video card supports. Those with less-than-optimal hardware can decrease graphic detail, and run the game in a window using 16- or 8-bit color.

ON THE GREEN

Gameplay offers maximum control with minimum interference. Each stroke consists of three easy steps: Click once for the onscreen aiming arrow; click again to set; and again to start the swing meter in motion. The designers use an overlaid swing meter with visual "sweet spots" for both power (backswing) and accuracy (contact point). Player stance is automatically calculated in the aiming process, which allows you to manually adjust for distance, trajectory, and swing intensity. The swing meter also reflects whether the shot is a drive, chip, or putt.

The game's physics model is incredibly flexible, automatically adjusts to atmospheric conditions for the flight path, and realistically reacts to objects and terrain upon landing. For example, a ball striking the trunk of a tree will react differently than one hitting the branches. For a dramatic demonstration of the game's physics model, try designing a hole using cart path as the primary surface, then watch as a 100-yard drive bounces clear into the next county.

Although JN4 doesn't utilize Direct-Draw for graphics, it employs both DirectPlay for its multiplayer modes, and DirectSound for its rich aural ambiance. The sound is so detailed (about 32MB worth) that the designers are able to assign the correct bird calls to each region.

Other goodies include the ability to best your low score by playing against previously recorded rounds. Adjustable views also let you see the course from any angle, down to one meter above the ball, which is helpful for lining up difficult putts.

HOOK SHOT

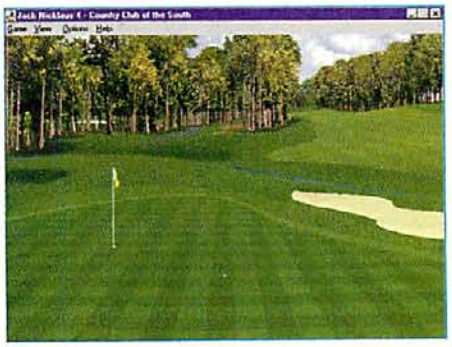
Unfettered kudos aside, there's a few dark clouds on JN4's horizon. Talk about system shock: Typical installation requires a whopping 171MB chunk of your hard drive. As if anticipating consumer resistance, Accolade makes absolutely no mention of this fact on the box or in the manual. Also, each 18-hole course you create zaps an additional 10MB or more.

Minor quibbles also include the animated grid overlay used to gauge terrain grades. The grid turns off between shots—an annoying oversight. And "animated"? Slowly draping over the ground isn't a feature worth bragging about.

Still, from play mechanics and graphics rendering to course design and multiplayer capabilities, JACK NICKLAUS 4 is one of the most well-crafted games—of any genre—that I've seen in years.



SWING TIME Unlike other golf sims, JN4's controls are unobtrusive and easy to learn.



ALL NATURAL, NO FILLER JN4's proprietary height-mapping engine yields unparalleled realism.

APPEAL: Computer golfers of all experience levels.

PROS: The best graphics of any golf sim to date; the user interface and course editor are models of perfection; excellent choice of multiplayer modes; free custom courses galore.

CONS: High system requirements; typical installation eats 171MB from your hard drive.

CG RATED ★★★★★

Course Conversions and Web Sites

Talk about getting your money's worth! If you're an avid golfer, JACK NICKLAUS 4 may well be the deal of your dreams. Not only do you get five courses and a built-in designer, but you'll also inherit what amounts to an instant library of thousands of custom-designed links. JN4 has the ability to import and convert courses created with its predecessor, JACK NICKLAUS SIGNATURE EDITION.

All you need is a modem and access to the Internet or other major online services, including America Online, Compuserve, and Delphi. There you'll find enough courses to make your putter flutter indefinitely. The conversion process only transfers terrain shapes and elevations, so you'll have to add objects such as trees and bushes. But that's a minor chore and a heck of a lot easier than starting from scratch.

Below is a list of only a few top Web sites offering hundreds of JNSE courses, available as free downloads. Each site was confirmed as active at the time of this writing:

JNSE Fantasyland
http://users.aol.com/td4729/jnse.htm

The Linksland
http://quancon.com/~brent.blackburn/jnse.htm

The Wild Onion
http://www.onion.com/jnse.htm

Golf Paradise
http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/1113/

Steve Opfer's JNSE Golf Page
http://www.infi.net/~opfer/golf.htm

Chris Furgerson's JNSE Courses
http://www2.netquest.com/~reolakes/cfjnse.html

Brian Silvernail's Golf Course Designs
http://members.aol.com/bsilvrnail/index.htm

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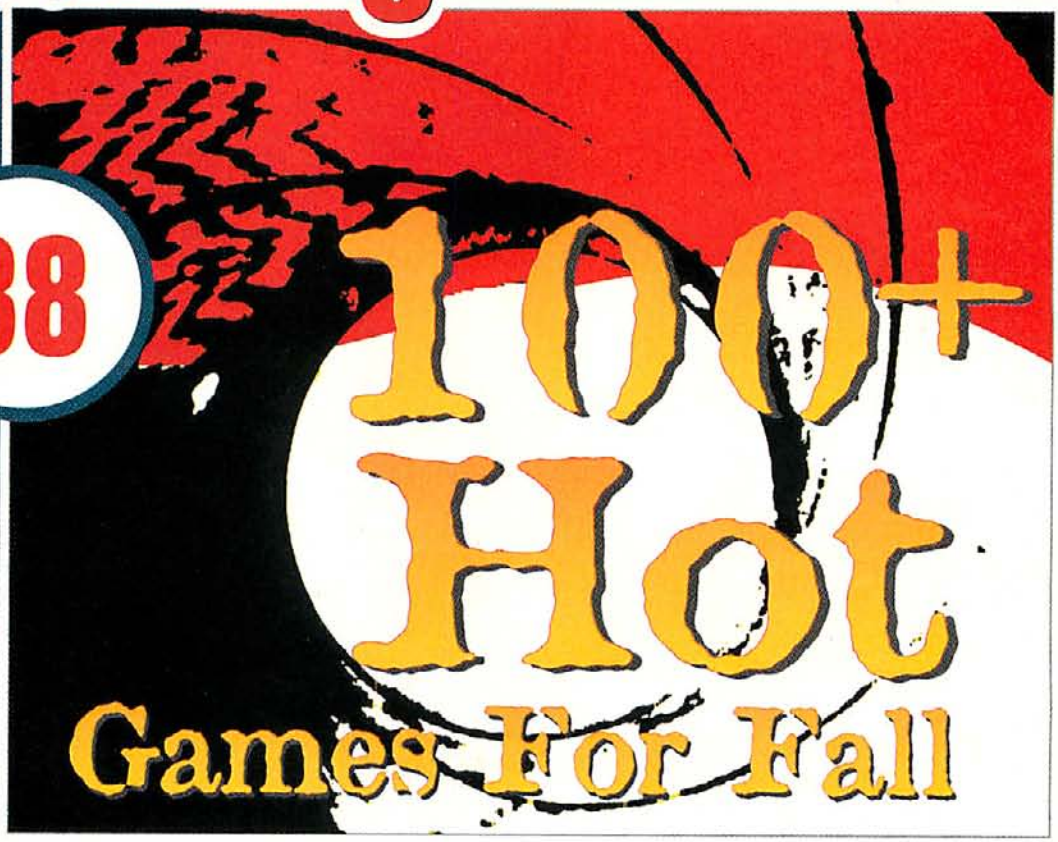
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The #1 Computer Game Magazine
Computer Gaming World

COVER STORY



***CGW*'s infiltration of the Electronic Entertainment Expo yielded a 28-page bonanza on the hottest new titles heading your way. We've separated the coolness from the crap, and herein present the ultimate insider briefing on the best titles in every genre. Even through our jaded eyes, we were very impressed with the overall quality of new titles in the channel. But since there are 1,500 games coming your way, we'll focus on the best ones for the bucks.**

92 Quake II

You're obviously not a QUAKE fanatic, because if you were you would have already turned to the story. So we're wondering, do you know what QUAKE is? Are you into reading magazine contents pages? Need to add more fiber to your diet?



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Exclusive! Dennis "Call Me Daddy" Hopper Talks Games...pg. 26

THE MEDIEVAL CATHEDRAL OFTEN SERVED AS A CENTER FOR LEARNING. THIS IS GOING TO BE A VERY PAINFUL LESSON.

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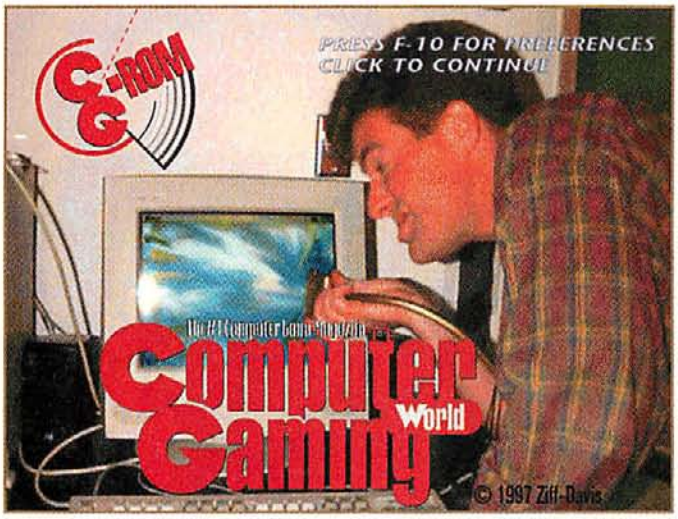
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Delicious Demos and Spy Photos

Undercover CGW Operatives Bring You Covert Recon on 38 Cool Games in Development





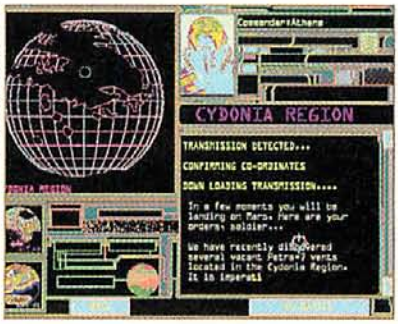
WARLORDS III



In addition to 14 great playable demos, this month's CD features 76 top-secret screenshots on games under construction at 29 different companies. So check out the screens of the games you're looking forward to, and have a ball with our awesome lineup of the hottest available demos!



EXTREME ASSAULT



DARK COLONY



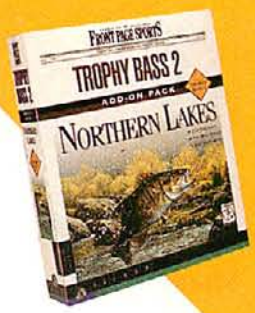
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BETRAYAL AT ANTARA

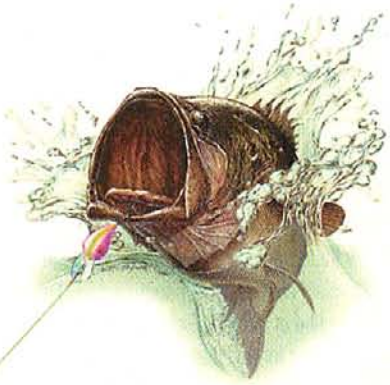
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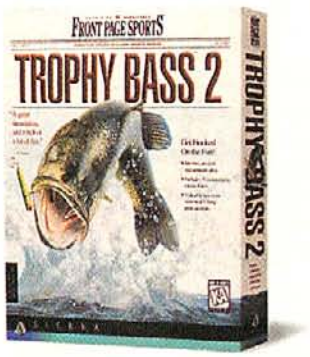




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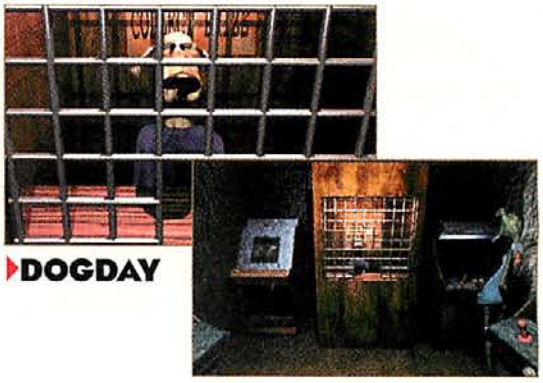
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IMPERIALISM



SHADOW WARRIOR



DOGDAY

How Do I Use the Disc?

The CD is Autoplay enabled and should begin when you load it into the CD-ROM drive. Otherwise, select Run from the Program Manager in Windows 3.x, or Start Menu in Windows 95, and type D:\RUN-ME (where D is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD. You may type D:\INSTALL to create a *CGW* program group on your Windows desktop for future fun. Many demos require the disc to be in the CD-ROM drive in order to run; therefore, we recommend installing the demos from our disc.

How Do I Play the Demos?

To view the demos, first click on Editors' Hot Picks, Special Features, or Product Demos. Then click on the title of interest. Each demo has its own instructions for installation.

How Do I Get the Patch Files?

Click on Patches under the *CGW* Features, and then read the text window that has instructions on copying the files to your hard drive. You can also access the patches from a DOS prompt by typing D:\PATCHES (where D is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) and copying them directly to your hard drive. We strongly recommend that you back up any previously saved games before installing a patch, as this may overwrite your existing program.

How Can I Get the CG-ROM Delivered Each Month?

To subscribe to the CD-ROM version of the magazine, call (303) 665-8930, and specify that you want the CD-ROM version. Please note that if you already receive the magazine without the CD, you must wait until your current subscription expires before you can order the CD version.

If you have a problem receiving the CD version, send an email with your name, address, phone number, and subscriber number to cgw@neodata.com. Neodata is a magazine fulfillment house that is not owned or operated by Ziff-Davis.

Where Can I Buy the CDs?

Copies of *CGW* with the CD are available in most major retailers where magazines are sold. If you can't find the magazine with the CD, encourage your retailer to carry it. To find out where *CGW* can be purchased near you, or to suggest that it be carried at your local retailer, please email Gerry at: getsmart@ils.net.

Unfortunately, we can not fulfill requests for back issues of CD-ROMs at this time.

Disclosure

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AUGUST CG-ROM TITLES

TITLE	PLATFORM	DIRECTORY	EXECUTABLE
Betrayal at Antara	WIN/95	ANT_DEMO	BIADEMO.EXE
Black Dahlia	DOS/WIN	DAHLIA	SETUP.EXE
Catchword	WIN/95	CATCHWRD	CAEW027A.EXE
Chron X	95/NT	CHRONX	CHRONX.EXE
Dark Colony	95	DC	SETUP.EXE
DirectX 3.a	95	DIRECTX	DXSETUP.EXE
Dog Day	95	DOGDEMO	SETUP.EXE
Extreme Assault	DOS	ASSAULT	SETUP.EXE
Fallout	95	FALLDEMO	FALLDEMO.EXE
Heat	95	HEAT	SETUP.EXE
Imperialism	95	IMPERIAL	SETUP.EXE
Machine Hunter	95	MACHINE	MACHHUNT.EXE
Monday Night Football 98	95	ABCMNF98	ABCMNF98.EXE
Muzzle Velocity	DOS only	MUZZLE	RUN.BAT
Patches	n/a	PATCHES	n/a
Shadow Warrior	DOS	SHADOW	INSTALL.EXE
Warlords III	95	WAR3DEMO	SETUP.EXE

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Charge of the Online Brigade

There Are Many Ways to Pay for Play



I have always been skeptical of the idea that a solid online-gaming business could be built around flat-rate pricing. Even AOL just threw in the towel and established a $2-per-hour fee for certain games. I know TEN believes that there is still a business there, but I also know that it's working on some pretty creative ways to bring in more subscribers and encourage gamers to pay to play. Mpath gave up on the flat-rate model. Now, it's trying the advertising-subsidized model along with some premium subscription games. That's not far from Microsoft's tiered-pricing model for Internet Gaming Zone, where some games are free and some are at a premium.

I also don't think services and publishers can depend upon advertising as their primary revenue. Advertising agencies may be willing to take chances on the Web this year, but next year, they're going to be looking more at click-through than impressions. That bodes poorly for advertising that is placed within the game context or even in frames around a game. Even in something as simple as a trivia game, players aren't going to want to click away from the game and onto an advertising page. They want to have as much time as possible to answer the next question.

Which pricing model will win? Will gamers want to pay to play? If there is one thing we know for certain about the online-gaming crowd, it's that they don't like the meter running. Online-game services and companies who publish online games are going to have to figure out creative ways to garner revenue. Here are a few of the alternate pricing structures that you are likely to see:

> **"Advertising agencies may be willing to take chances on the Web this year, but next year, they're going to be looking more at click-through than impressions."**

SEASONAL

Sports gamers can readily understand the idea of paying by the season. Fantasy sports owners have paid by the season for years, so it's a natural for online sports leagues. In the same way, imagine a wargamer signing on and paying by the campaign or a fantasy role-player signing up for a hunting license that is good for a one- or two-week dragon season. Of course, some games will simply enable you to pay by the day or month, as well. Since you know how much you'll pay before you sign up, you don't have to worry about the meter.

TOURNAMENTS

Would you pay extra to play in a tournament in which you could earn money or prizes? Some services are betting that you would. Nolan Bushnell's PlayNet is planning to pay real money and award prizes to gamers who win in their weekly or monthly tournaments. Other services are considering the same structure if gambling laws don't prohibit it.

TRANSACTIONAL

Some games are ideal for limited expansion. Gamers could learn the mechanics of a system absolutely free and play free as long as they stay in the newbie area or the novice arena. Once they wanted to feel their oats, however, they would download (for a charge) the terrain for the next military campaign, flight mission, puzzle-filled adventuring environment, golf course, racetrack, or RPG quest. This would also work when packaged games are sold through retail channels and game publishers want to publish the cyber-equivalent of add-on disks. The major difference is that these add-ons (or, to use the marketing term, razor blades) wouldn't incur the costs of marketing them at retail.

MICROTRANSACTIONAL

This alternative is really theoretical, but interesting. Publishers always want to put additional weapons, vehicles, powers, maps, and objects into their games, but often run out of time, CD space, or financial resources to include them. If Digicash or E-cash were a reality, gamers might be willing to pay $2 for a hot classic car for LEGENDS OF GRAND PRIX, pony up $1 for that special halberd for their fantasy game, or pay $1.50 to get a spiffy custom uniform for their AGENTS OF JUSTICE superhero. Custom publishing for microtransactions might not only provide an additional revenue stream for products, but also give legs to existing products.

The next 18 months will offer plenty of experimentation in pricing models for online gaming. I'll wager that you'll see all of these and more. I'll also wager that the winner will use a combination of methods to match the pricing scheme to the game.

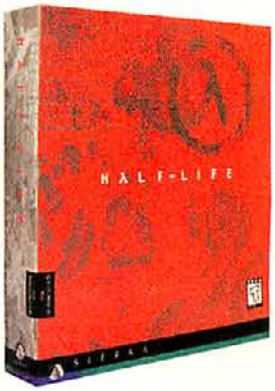

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE 156

LETTER OF THE MONTH

KILLER MAGAZINE

I like your mag a lot, otherwise I wouldn't be writing, but there are *some* things...well...there *are* things....

1. QUAKE Killers: Every even semi-hip gamer knows that is bull; the only reason to use that title in your June issue is because you know that the name QUAKE attracts attention. Not even QUAKE II will kill QUAKE. It's the original. I'm gonna play every new 3D game that comes down the pike, but you can bet your ass I'm gonna go back to good old E1M1 every once in a while for a trip down memory lane.

a. By the way, despite the title, I found that article (or group of articles, depending on how you look at) to be one of the best I've seen in a long time. Also, I give you an A+ on the layout.

2. Loyd Case's tech column was a nice general overall article. I just want to point out some exceptions to the rule:

a. Changing one thing at a time.... Recently, with my modem, I had to change both the settings for com2 and the settings for the modem before restarting. Changing only one would have just made more problems.

b. 48 hours, bah humbug! It took me 3–4 days to get the modem working exactly right. A corrupt passwords file, by the way, can be a serious pain.

c. Note: writing error messages down is excellent. However, *if* possible, a screenshot is even better. Also, screenshots of current system settings that work will help if you happen to mess with them and want to put them back the way you had them.

3. QUAKE as Pentium only?! Where do you get your info? I ran QUAKE for six months on a 486/33mhz with 8MB of RAM, and it really wasn't all that bad. I first beat the shareware version on my old 486 and I have to tell ya', Cthon rising out of that lava is even more breathtaking at a slightly slower speed (he seems to drip lava). Well, that and the fact that it was 3 a.m.!

4. QUAKERALLY is not out yet, so the article mentioning it was a tad premature. And that "Yahoo! for QUAKE" that McGee said. Well, granted that's about the right term, however I believe that was used in conjunction with a little April Fools' joke that Slipgate Central would be joining up with Yahoo!

Okay, I'm done, now. I will now reaffirm that this is the best issue I've seen in a long time and that I love your mag. If that seems weird, consider this, I only point out the flaws in things I like, if I didn't like the mag I would say to myself, "This sucks" and never waste my time writing this. I subscribe to the idea that if it's good, it's worth *constructive* criticism to make it that much better. I hope I've helped.

Isaac Dawson
from the Internet

Great games can be surpassed. So, we try to alert you to potential great game "Killers" on the horizon whenever we see some great games that may potentially surpass the hottest games of the present. As for machine recommendations, we've pointed out in the past that every gamer has a different tolerance with regard to frame rate and game speed. To you, a slow Cthon was impressive. To others, it would be a slide show. We appreciate your criticism and decided to share it.

L.A. STORY

As I flipped through your magazine the other day I read with great excitement your "Escape to L.A." preview. I was appalled to see that you did not say a word about HEAVY GEAR, which is to be released this summer (supposedly). I was further horrified when I looked at the "Pipeline" section and it did not have a release date for MECHWARRIOR 3. Come on, do you have something against robots?

D. Wilson
from the Internet

Since we had devoted several pages to HEAVY GEAR (our April '97 cover story) in a recent issue, we opted to cover other Activision games in the "Escape to L.A." story. Also, because FASA Interactive hadn't set a date for the MECHWARRIOR 3 release when we went to press (it's still not definite), we did not put it in the Pipeline. We estimate MW3's release to be in the first quarter of next year, even though FASA's goal is to get it out before the end of '97.



FEEDING OUR MECH BIAS We not only like the traditional style of giant robot games, but we're impressed with FASA's real-time strategy game, too.

A FISTFUL OF RATING

Though I have been reading *CGW* for more than a few years now, this is the first time I have felt compelled to write in response to an article that I have read. I have just finished reading Mark Clarkson's review of OUTLAWS, and for the most part I agree with his assessment of the game's strengths and weaknesses, but I feel he overlooks some very subtle, but important points:

The game has the most believable premise that I have yet to see in a first-person shooter. It's a nice change of pace from your demon/alien *du jour*.

I like the fact that you can't run indefinitely. It's still not realistic, considering the 250 pounds of ammo/weapons you're carting around, but it's a start. The way the game models gun drift and settling was a nice change also. If it wasn't the first time it was modeled, it was the first time I have noticed this implemented.

Though some may say that DUKE 3D modeled reloading of a weapon, I don't ever remember ducking around a corner, heart thumping and sweating rivers as I pumped shells into the old Winchester or .45.

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Also, I would like to add more emphasis to the interesting level designs. The train was a bit simplistic, but it was one of the most entertaining settings I have ever shot my way through.

Since this was a rehash of the DARK FORCES engine, I didn't expect the graphics to be stupendous, but I have seen the 3Dfx-enabled patch, and it helps! On the weapons not being easily distinguished from one another while lying on the ground, I have to agree. Yet, in the end, are you not going to pick it up, because you're not sure if it's the rifle or the shotgun?

There is one last thing: When you turn up the difficulty, it doesn't just increase the number of bad guys, it models damage by having you die from just a bullet or two, rather than twenty. This can make for some extended gun battles from storefronts and the like, where you use every piece of cover available to stay alive. I hope that more games start to model some of these finer details.

Bob Coates
SSI Webmaster

You raised some good points, Bob. But our mail is mixed on this subject. Check out the following response.

Your review of OUTLAWS in July rates the game too high (three stars). I have tried to play this game and it is very poor. I play using a three-button mouse and followed the directions for setting the buttons, but the center button always defaults to the same function as the left mouse button. I have been on the Net to LucasArts, but they would give no help. It will be a long time before I buy another product made by this company.

Keep up the good reviews but please give more details of how the game being reviewed does not live up to expectations.

Robert Clover
from the Internet

HEROES WITH WEB FEAT

I'm writing about Sierra's decision to add multiplayer support to QUEST FOR GLORY 5. In my opinion, this is an incredibly stupid thing to do. It seems that game designers have become so caught up in the multiplayer rage that they don't realize some games just don't need multiplayer features!!! The QFG series is adventure, for God's sake! What on earth could multiple players do for it?

Now, let me tell you that I have been a huge fan of the series. QUEST FOR GLORY I (originally HERO'S QUEST) was the first computer game I ever played, and I have religiously picked up every new QFG game as they arrived in stores, but I'm thinking twice about this one.

Sierra seems totally clueless about this whole thing too. They are mindlessly cramming multiplayer support in all of their games. If it doesn't work, they find some other way to include the Internet in the game (SHIVERS 2).

I have a message for all you game designers out there: Go ahead and add multiplayer support to some games. Action, strategy, sports, and even role playing. But think twice before adding it to games that require multiple sittings, puzzles, character interaction, or a storyline that's actually part of the game. Think of DISCWORLD, THE BEAST WITHIN, or TOONSTRUCK with multiplayer support. It just doesn't work!

Erik Wahlstrom
from the Internet

Assuming that an adventure game is, by definition, merely a story gated by puzzles, you are correct. Multiplayer features won't add anything. If, however, part of the heart and soul of an adventure game is conversation, QFG 5's multiplayer additions may give extra depth to the universe. We'll be watching to see how it works and salute Sierra for being willing to take risks, but we thought your perspective was interesting and would resonate with a lot of our readers.

ViRGE OF HORROR

I really don't know what to expect from the new wave of 3D games, accelerator cards, and the like. One thing that makes me question such a thing is the fact that the 3D graphics on MDK...well...suck. Is it just that the game doesn't use Direct-3D too well, or is it my graphics card (S3 ViRGE/VX with 4MB)? I know, I know

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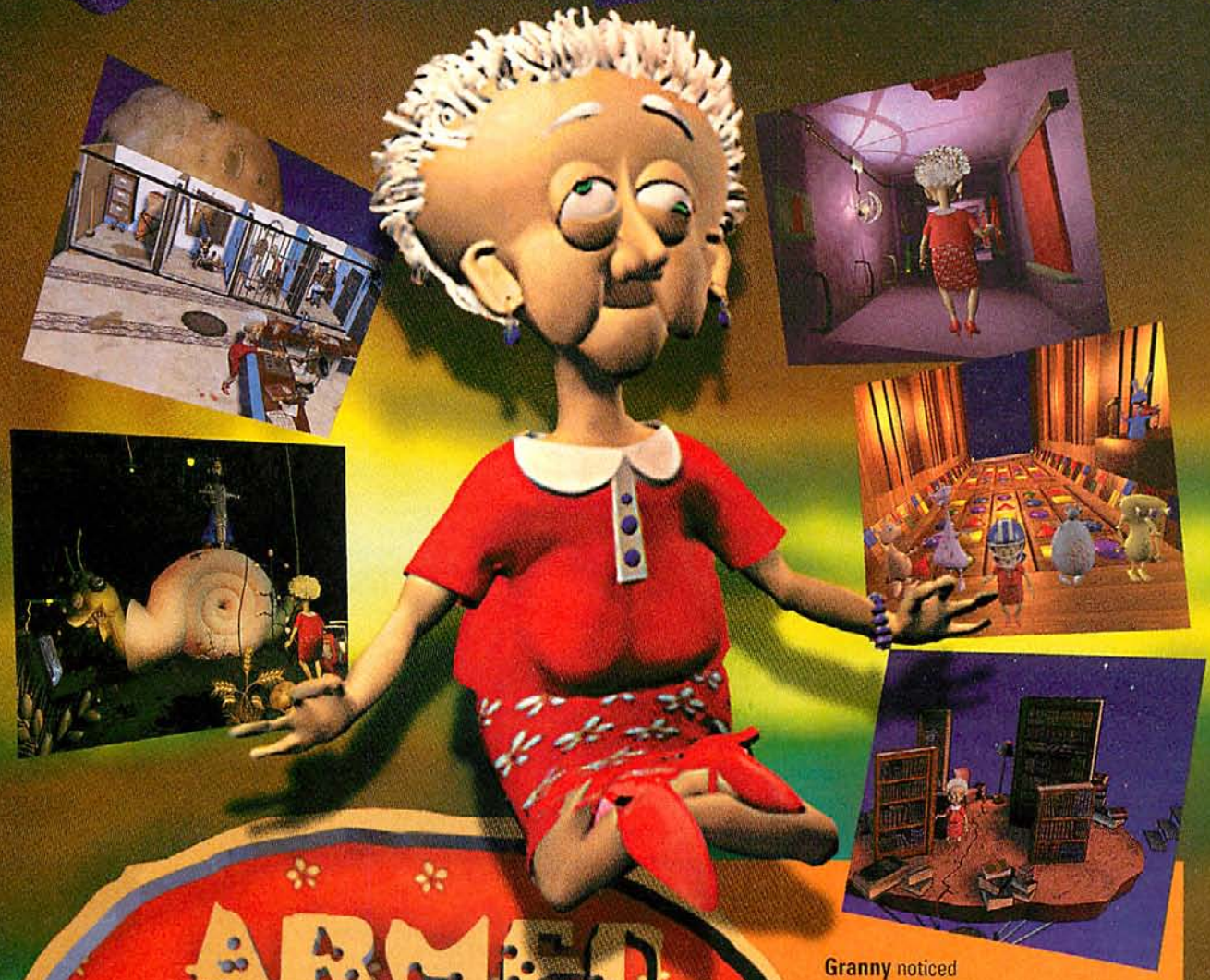
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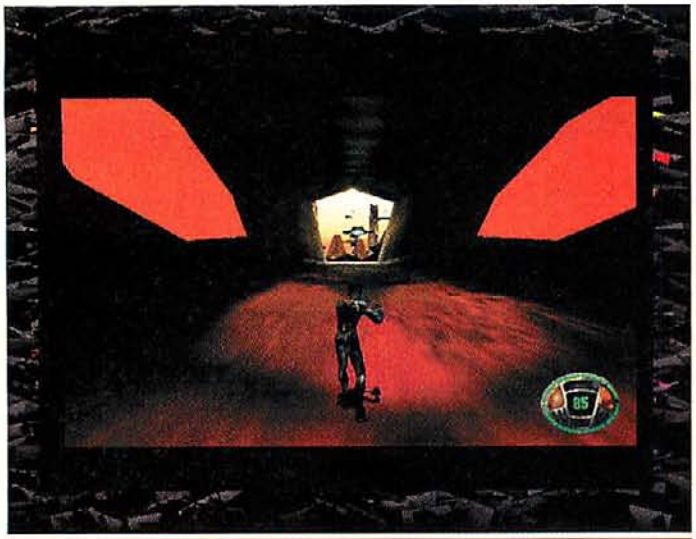
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #126



CON-ViRGE-ANCE The transparency test failed (red zones) and anti-aliasing (jaggies on the doorway) didn't work well on MDK with the ViRGE card.

the card isn't great but, still, the graphics were terrible. The enemies were way too pixelized, and it made my Pentium Pro 200MHz run like a Pentium 90, at least according to the performance test. Without Direct3D my machine had the 109 mark under performance compared to the 100 that it said a P-Pro 200MHz would run like. Is it my card? Though it probably is, I just bought this machine in February with the card preinstalled. Does this mean the true 3D cards haven't come out yet? Too many questions and not enough answers. I have been using computers for only about two years now and am not that technically proficient. So when you start busting out with PCIs, ports, and ISAs, I'm lost. I try and read other magazines that focus more on the hardware part of the computer to see what they say about 3D cards. So, when they have the Best Products of 1996 stamped all over their covers, and I look for the best 3D card, they say something like this: This is most definitely the best 2D/3D card out there *for now*. For now? What the hell does that mean?! What the hell are we waiting for?!

Just responding to this could clear up a few things for me. By the way, June's demos were the best set of demos you've put out so far. Keep up the great work.

Paul Karczewski
from the Internet

It's a breath mint and a candy mint! What you're seeing is a combination of factors. We tested MDK in D3D with both a 3dfx-based card and an S3 ViRGE GX card. With both cards, we noticed that the textures were chunkier than we like. Chalk that up to the software engine. However, the ViRGE failed at the transparency test and didn't support anti-aliasing. So, the MDK experience with the ViRGE had lots of big ugly places where one dominant color would replace a cool transparency effect; it also had some jagged edges you wouldn't expect with 3D-card support. Since the D3D drivers worked fine on the 3dfx card, we presume that the problem is with the way the card works with D3D, not with D3D itself.

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Edited by Charlotte Panther (CPanther@zd.com)

Dennis the Menace

Hopper Unravels the Mystery of the Black Dahlia in Take 2's New Adventure



Dennis Hopper is a Hollywood legend. He boasts a film career that spans over four decades and he has captured and maintained the interest of each new generation. Hopper has starred in movies that not only proved significant in their own day, but later achieved recognition as cult classics. In the fifties it was *Rebel Without a Cause*; in the sixties, *Easy Rider*; in the seventies, *Apocalypse Now*; and in the eighties, *Blue Velvet*.



This decade, Hopper is truly ubiquitous. We've seen him in blockbuster hits (*Speed*), lackluster hits (*WaterWorld*), and Gen-X cult flicks (*True Romance*). We've even switched on our television sets to be greeted by his menacing stare as he enticed us to buy Nikes. Most surprising, though, was Hopper's decision to venture into the medium of computer gaming. BLACK DAHLIA, his second CD-ROM project with game developer Take 2 Interactive, is due to ship next month.

Some may recall Hopper's first foray into the medium: He did a voice-over in Take 2's less-than-stellar HELL: A CYBERPUNK THRILLER, which received a one-star review from *CGW* in 1995. Why would an actor of Hopper's caliber commit to another PC game after the first project was considered (at least critically) a disappointment?

Hopper is very honest about his involvement with Take 2. He took on the first project, HELL, at the request of CEO Ryan Brant, who is the son of one of Hopper's good friends, Peter Brant.

"I got involved [through] the family and I did the first CD-ROM, which I enjoyed," Hopper explains. He also stands to gain from Take 2's success: "I have stock in the company, which makes me more interested.

THIS JUST IN

Short takes on games and hardware released just prior to press time.

MEAT PUPPET

MEAT PUPPET's three-quarters, isometric view and rampant gunplay may remind gamers of the CRUSADER series of games, but MEAT PUPPET is its own twisted, highly enjoyable animal. As Lotos Abstraction, reluctant assassin, you'll shoot, gas, and explode your way through a highly detailed landscape of rotting urban blight. MEAT PUPPET's wicked sense of humor, exemplified by truly warped monsters and a day-care center from Hell, sets it far apart from the pack. Remarkably fluid animation (at even the highest resolutions) keeps the action rolling as Lotos mows down scores of bad guys en route to cutting her puppet strings.—*Robert Coffey*



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Reader Service #: 301

STAR WARPED

STAR WARPED, the second parody title from the wacky folks at





It's doing very well...so I'm a happy camper," he adds with a smile.

Hopper admits that working on CD-ROMs on a regular basis is not worth his while, and he wouldn't do it for anyone other than Ryan Brant. If you're wondering, then, how Take 2 managed to snag Victoria's Secret model Stephanie Seymour for HELL, it's because Ryan's father, Peter, just happens to be married to her.

> "I've played some nice guys—Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet* is a nice guy."

While the financial reward may be less substantial, Hopper claims that, for him, the process of making a CD-ROM is actually no different from making a movie. "[In] the first one I was merely a voice, and [my character] was animated. And in this one, I'm on camera, but the blue screen process is the same I've been using since I was 18 years old."

Hopper plays a fairly small, but significant, part in BLACK DAHLIA. As an agent for the CIO (the precursor to the CIA), he finds himself kicked off the case he's been working on, deemed unstable, and placed in a government-controlled sanitarium. Yes, it's another psycho role, but this time he's on our side.

After years of being cast as the menacing nut-case, does Hopper long to play the good guy? "Well, I've played some nice guys—Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet* is a nice guy," he jokes, referring to his role as the sadistic gangster in David Lynch's disturbing movie. "I've played different kinds of roles, but I'm known for my heavies. I've made my living playing those kind of heavies. I enjoy it." —*Charlotte Panther*

The Black Dahlia

Take 2's upcoming mystery adventure game, BLACK DAHLIA, was inspired by the unsolved murder of aspiring actress Elizabeth Short, nicknamed the Black Dahlia by a newspaper reporter who covered her case in the '40s. Short's death was thought to be connected to the brutal murders of a vicious serial-killer known as the Cleveland Torso Murderer, who was never apprehended.

Take 2 has also intertwined another historical element into this fascinating plot: the rise of Fascism in Europe. Some suspected that the Nazi victory was the result of supernatural assistance, since many of the Führer's inner circle were fascinated with mysticism, astrology, pagan Germanic ritual, and Norse myth.

BLACK DAHLIA combines each of these elements to form an "occult mystery," in which you play a rookie detective. Your investigation of a pro-German subversive group turns into a man-hunt for the notorious Torso Killer. Sucked into the nightmarish world of the supernatural, you must catch the killer before he completes a bloody occult ritual.

The game is set in the '40s, and combines FMV with gorgeously rendered backgrounds that can be fully explored. It wonderfully recreates the feel of the era with authentic costumes, furnishings, and decor. While this proved somewhat restrictive for artists who had worked on earlier Take 2 projects (where they had been allowed to let their creative juices flow freely in designing futuristic settings without limits), the final result of the BLACK DAHLIA design is stunning.

Although we've yet to see the most important ingredient—actual gameplay—Take 2 promises that the puzzles in BLACK DAHLIA will be plot-based. Add that to the intriguing storyline and sumptuous graphics, and the company should have a recipe for success.



Parroty Interactive, actually mixes some gameplay with the humor. (Then again, some might argue that PYST had at least as much gameplay as MYST....) You explore a basement belonging to two dorky brothers from Modesto who've collected so much *Star Wars* paraphernalia that, in comparison, even those of us with full-blown flight-sim cockpits feel pretty cool.

Along the way you'll watch hidden video from Skywalker Ranch, read rejected scripts (the *Pulp Fiction* meets *Star Wars* scripts alone are well worth the program's under-$20 price tag), mix the genes of your favorite characters, and play the U Don't No Jedi trivia game. There's also a 3D Asteroids game; X-Schwing, a fighting game; Flawed Fighters; and Death Star Destructo, an amusingly simple shooter. Sure to be everyone's favorite? Whack the Ewok, of course. But buy it for the humor, not the gameplay.—*Denny Atkin*

Parroty Interactive, (800) 910-2696
Win 95/Mac CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 302

FRONT PAGE SPORTS: BASEBALL PRO '98



It should be no surprise to fans of the FRONT PAGE SPORTS series that FPS: BASEBALL PRO '98 has the most robust league management module of any computer baseball game. You can conduct custom drafts; assign players to work on individual facets of their games; run career leagues where players improve and diminish over the simulated years; and choose from managing only to playing part of the game to playing all aspects of the game. It should also be

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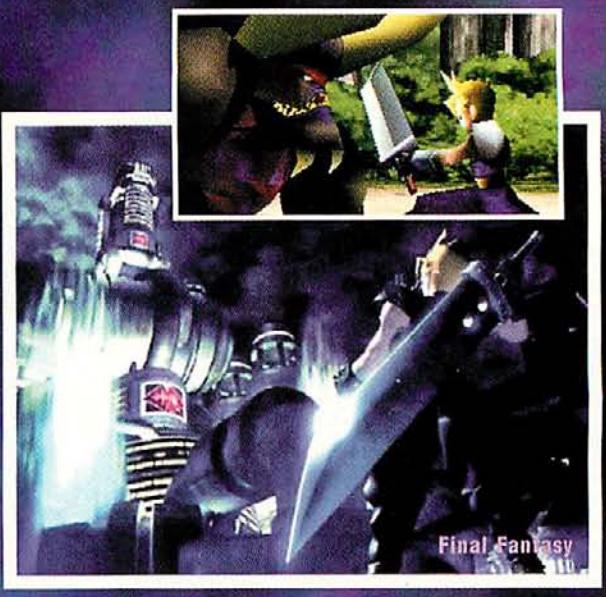





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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #123

A Gamer's Fantasy

Will the Greatest Console Role-Playing Series Win Over PC Owners?



FINAL FANTASY ranks as one of the most successful franchises in all of electronic entertainment. Squaresoft, the creator of the series, is legendary in its native Japan, and its premier FINAL FANTASY RPG line has sold Super Nintendos and now PlayStations. Seven role-playing games have been created under this franchise, three of which have been ported to the United States. In total, the series has sold more copies than the CIVILIZATION and DOOM franchises combined.

The FINAL FANTASY games are epic role-playing games offering scores of hours of gameplay over hundreds of locations and worlds with sometimes dozens of playable characters per game—and that's just on a 16-bit SNES cartridge, the medium of the first six FINAL FANTASY titles. These games break new ground not because of their near endless gameplay, but because of their unparalleled storytelling and drama. PC owners may be skeptical, but we'll soon have a chance to sample Squaresoft's finest. FINAL FANTASY VII, which centers on the world-spanning conflict between a corrupt government and a resistance movement, is the latest in the series—and it's set to arrive in the U.S. this September, for the PlayStation. As the first FINAL FANTASY game to use CDs, it could be the grandest of them all. Computer gamers will finally be able to see what all the furor is about when FFVII gets ported to Windows 95 sometime in early '98. It will be an exact port of the U.S. PlayStation version. We'll reveal more about FINAL FANTASY VII in our role-playing forecast next month.—*Elliott Chin*

Gone Fishin'

With at least five games currently in development using the QUAKE engine, there's no denying the impact that QUAKE has had on gamers and on gaming. We're the first to admit that we've spent many a lost weekend indulging in the sheer pleasure of one brutal frag-fest after another. But is there such a thing as going too far? Our latest discovery proves that people will use the QUAKE engine for anything.



QUAKE FISHING, an unofficial patch currently in the works for QUAKE, allows gamers to play the game as fishermen. In single-player mode, you can wade through freshwater lakes in search of trout, or track down barracudas in tropical climes. In multiplayer mode, you can choose to be fisherman or fish, and DeathMatches will include underwater combat with scuba gear and spear guns, and even a battle with a great white shark. For more information, swim on over to **http://home.att.net/~losblanco/qfishing/qfishing.html.**—*Charlotte Panther*

THIS JUST IN

no surprise that the menu-driven system is one of the most arcane and non-intuitive league management modules I've seen. The good news is that it's much faster to run through a season in fast mode than it was in last year's product.

—*Johnny Wilson*

Sierra On-Line,
(800) 757-7707
PC CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 303

VERSAILLES 1685

CG COLD

VERSAILLES 1685 casts you as a valet charged with foiling a madman's plot to destroy the palace of Louis XIV. Painstakingly researched and developed with the landmark's curators, VERSAILLES uses lush graphics, a smooth 3D-engine, and beautiful baroque music to re-create the splendor of the palace. It's too bad that such a well-intentioned product employs only the most hackneyed, uninvolving adventure game conventions and simple, inventory-based puzzles that are unlikely to challenge even casual gamers. A wealth of online historical documentation and an option to tour the palace make VERSAILLES 1685 a nifty history lesson but an afterthought of a game.—*Robert Coffey*



Cryo Interactive Entertainment,
(888) 557-2796
PC/Mac CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 304

CARMAGEDDON

CG HOT

In Europe, CARMAGEDDON's free-form, kill-the-pedestrians splatter-fest is already making censors see red. But if you look beyond the game's unapologetically grotesque premise—the winner leaves the longest trail of entrails—you'll find 36 wicked stunt tracks (when was the last time you did a loop-de-loop in a driving game?); a strong

Princess Maker 2

If you think there are no original concepts in computer role-playing, you may want to check out PRINCESS MAKER 2. In PM2, you play the role of a medieval Japanese hero who is trying to raise a heroic daughter. You manage her schedule to determine her skill-set in an extended phase of character generation. Then, when you think she's strong enough, you take her on adventures in a world reminiscent of the console role-playing games.

In the works

The graphics and sound aren't enhanced from the successful Japanese console games and prove to be rather monotonous, but the fascinating part of the game is that you are balancing resources and attributes very differently from the typical dungeon crawl. Do you send your daughter off to school to study Theology or Martial Arts? Does she enter the Harvest Festival bake-off, the martial arts tourney, or the dance contest? What personage should she try to impress when she visits the palace? The dialogue and narration are somewhat repetitive, but the style of gameplay is different from anything I've ever played. The graphics contain some anachronisms, which may disrupt some gamers' suspended disbelief. Also, since PM2 is set in another culture and another time, some of its obvious sexist assumptions didn't offend me as much as they would have if the game had been set in the modern period. However, being male, I may have a higher threshold of acceptance than a female gamer. Still, if Ignite brings this game into distribution at a reasonable price, it's worth looking at just for its fresh subject matter.—*Johnny Wilson*



PLAYING LATELY

CGW Survey*

	Last Month	Months on Chart
1. Diablo (Blizzard)	1	5
2. Civilization II (MicroProse)	6	16
3. Duke Nukem 3D (3D Realms)	4	17
4. Red Alert (Westwood/Virgin)	2	6
5. Quake (id Software)	5	9
6. Heroes II (New World Computing)	3	6
7. X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter (LucasArts)	-	1
8. WarCraft II (Blizzard)	9	19
9. Daggerfall (Bethesda)	9	8
10. Magic: The Gathering (MicroProse)	-	1
10. Tomb Raider (Eidos)	7	4

** Check your mailbox: We mail a survey to 1,500 randomly-chosen subscribers each month. The results of Playing Lately indicate what games readers are blowing the most time on, as opposed to the reader's overall "quality ranking" in the Top 100.*

PC Data Best-Sellers**

1. X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter (LucasArts)	4
2. Diablo (Blizzard)	1
3. Myst (Broderbund)	3
4. Red Alert (Westwood/Virgin)	2
5. Need For Speed II (Electronic Arts)	-
6. Microsoft Flight Sim (Microsoft)	6
7. Redneck Rampage (Interplay)	-
8. C&C: Counterstrike (Westwood/Virgin)	5
9. MDK (Playmates Interactive)	-
10. NASCAR II (Sierra On-Line)	-

*** This list indicates which PC games were the top-sellers, as calculated by PC Data, during May, 1997.*

physics model; spectacular accidents; clever power-ups and awards for stylishly committed mayhem; an instant-replay mode that draws out the comedy in this graphic gore-fest; and brawny, wide-open environments. It's DEATH RACE 2000 with a save-game function and the (regrettably) odd bug. And it's killer.—*Peter Olafson*



Interplay Productions, (800) INTERPLA
Win 95/DOS CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 305

SOLDIER BOYZ

CG GOLD

This just might be the game that drives a stake into the heart of FMV. SOLDIER BOYZ, which is basically a shooting gallery on video, features actors emoting in a ludicrously overwrought, scenery-chewing style generally reserved for community college productions of *Twelve Angry Men*. Limp gameplay is hampered by controls that redefine sluggish and unresponsive. Adding to the lameness, this all-video albatross seems to have been shot through a scuba mask smeared with Vaseline, resulting in blurry, Mr. Magoo-like visuals, where enemies are indistinguishable from trees and airplanes. Such sloppy, thoughtless design dooms you to constant reloading of saved games.—*Robert Coffey*



DreamCatcher Interactive, (888) 611-9999
Win 95/DOS 5.0 CD-ROM
Reader Service #: 306

CAPITALISM PLUS

CG HOT

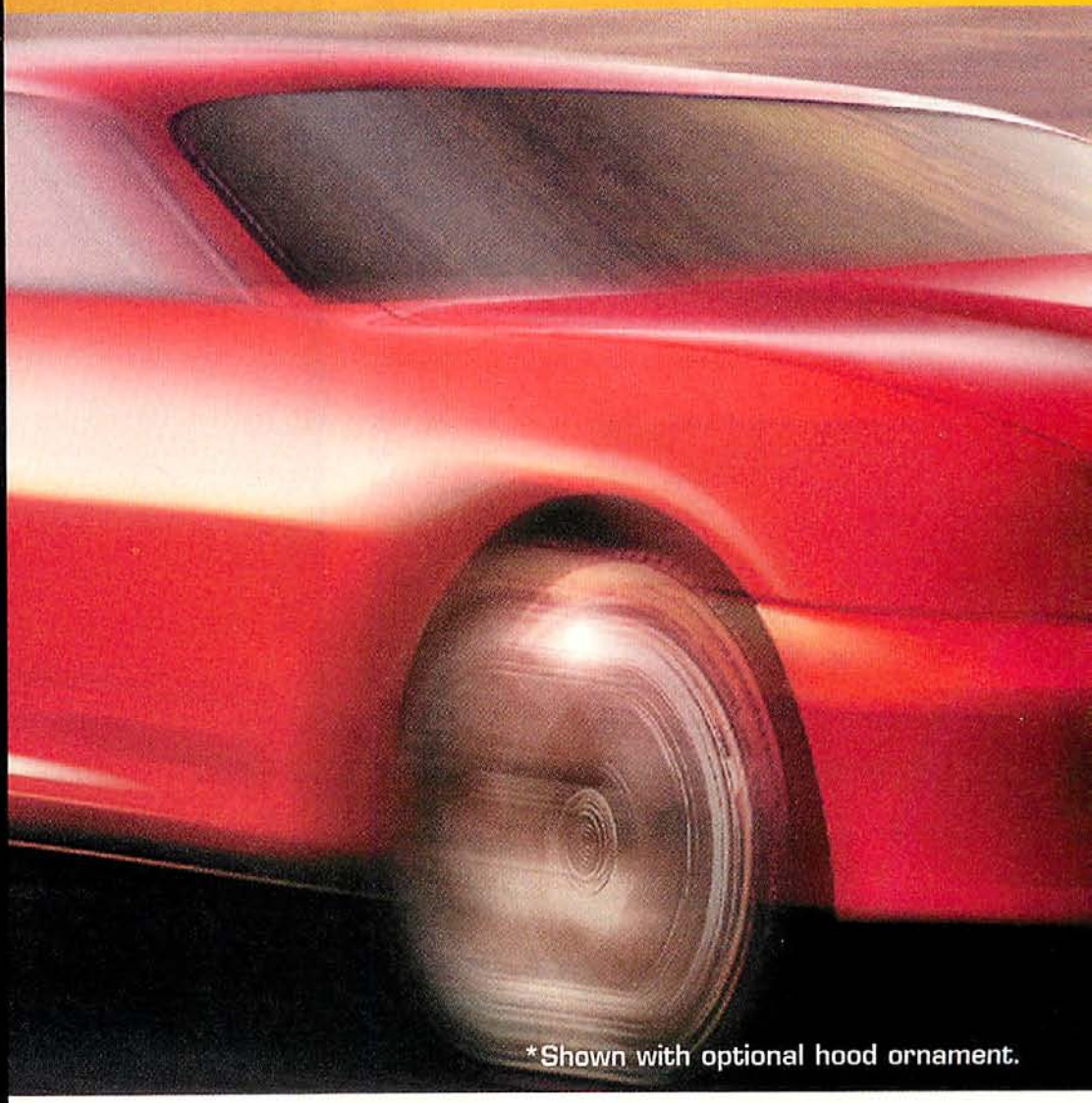
Interactive Magic may have had trouble putting out a good strategy game lately,

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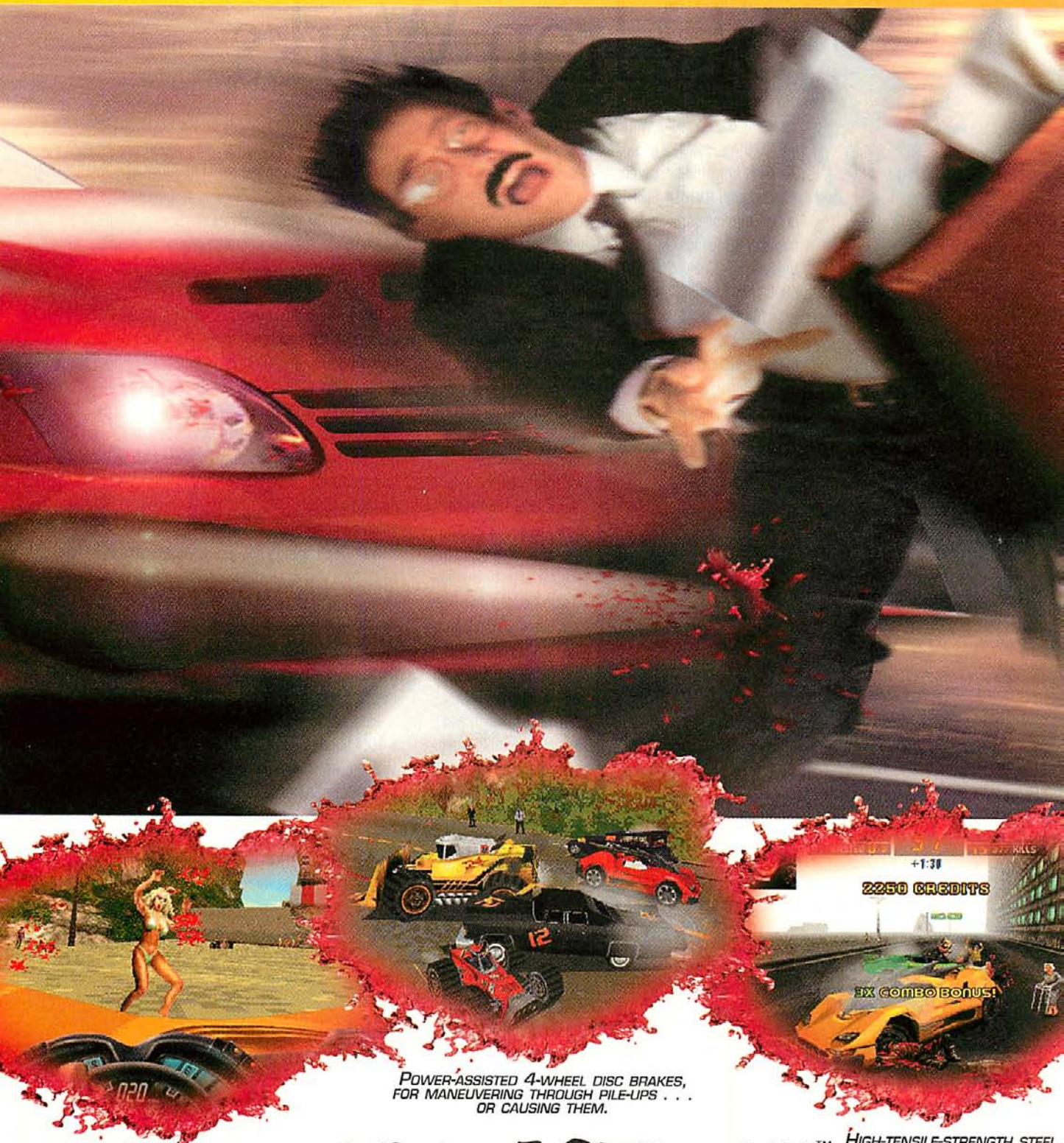
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #**067**

SCi™



3D Iron Works

In this edition of the Works, we've got early data on NVIDIA's Riva 128 board, as well as early specs on new parts from Trident, Chromatic Research, and Oak.

We put an **NVIDIA** Riva 128 reference board with beta 4 drivers through some initial tests, comparing it to Diamond's Monster 3D (which uses 3Dfx's Voodoo chipset) and VideoLogic's Grafix Star 600 (which uses Tseng Labs' ET-6000 chip), running on a Gateway Pentium 166 (no MMX) with 16MB of RAM. In QUAKE's TimeDemo tests at 320x200 and 640x480, the Riva 128 goes neck and neck with the ET-6000 board, an impressive feat. On the 3D side, Riva 128's 3D WinBench score is only two—yes, two—WinMarks behind the score posted by the Monster 3D. Given that the Riva's drivers are beta—again, an impressive feat. STB will most likely be shipping a Riva 128-based board as you're reading this, and we've heard that another large boardmaker is also working on a Riva 128 board. STB's board, the Lightspeed 128/3D, will hit the street at $199 with 4MB of SGRAM.



A 3D scene rendered with Oak Technology's Warp 5 chip.

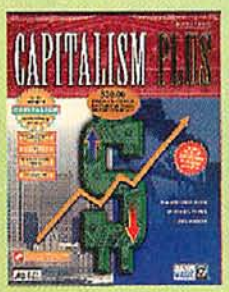
Trident, which was among several 2D chipmakers to team up with 3Dfx and its Voodoo Rush part, has announced details on the 3D Image 985DVD, a full-featured 2D/3D part that will support the 2X AGP interface. Like several second-generation designs, the 985DVD sports an on-chip setup engine, and supports subpixel positioning for more accurate rendering. Although no boardmakers have announced products using the 985DVD, Trident has announced demo ports of Eidos' TOMB RAIDER, TERRACIDE, and APACHE.

Chromatic Research is working on its Mpact 2 media processor, the successor to the first-generation Mpact/3000 chip. Chromatic's Mpact does have some 3D-acceleration functionality, but the chip's design emphasis is to be a media processor first and a 3D accelerator second. The second-generation Mpact 2, which uses Rambus memory technology, adds circuitry to bring Mpact 2's feature-complete 3D acceleration abilities more on par with the competition. Mpact 2-based boards will most likely be shipping later this year.

Oak Technology showed its Warp 5 chip at E3, and this could be a very interesting 2D/3D part. As is the case with VideoLogic/NEC's PowerVR, Warp 5 has a chunk-based 3D rendering engine, and supports on-the-fly z-buffering, but Warp 5 also supports on-the-fly trilinear filtering. The initial demo looks very impressive, but Warp 5 will only initially interface with the PCI bus, with an AGP version to follow.

Last, but by no means least, **Intergraph** has announced a 3Dfx Voodoo Rush-based board called the Intense 3D Voodoo, which should be shipping soon after you read this.—*Dave Salvator*

THIS JUST IN



but they know a winner when they see one. CAPITALISM was the best business game ever made, and this latest installment can only make armchair market analysts happier. While *C+* doesn't offer enough to be a full-fledged sequel, it is certainly a power upgrade (I-Magic is offering a $20 rebate to CAPITALISM owners) and brings the new options, graphics, and markets that make a big game bigger...and better. Despite the excellent tutorial, this game still isn't for those with only a casual interest in the business world. Only hard-core Cyber-Magnates need apply.—*Martin E. Cirulis*

Interactive Magic, (800) 789-1534

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 307

GOOCH GRUNDY'S GOOFY X-DECATHLON

Do you find the humor of the *Police Academy* movies a little highbrow? Then GOOCH GRUNDY'S GOOFY X-DECATHLON may suit you just fine. Attempting to be a wacky sports game, it seems closer to ten early-'80s-style arcade games with snappy graphics, all sold in one package. Events include variations of running games, jumping games, and maze games. Compounding the poor gameplay is lame humor. The jokes just don't have enough action to be slapstick and not enough ideas to be conceptual. The only "goofy" component of the X-DECATHLON will be the folks uninformed enough to buy it.—*Matthew Schaefer*

Microforum, (800) 465-CDCD

PC CD-ROM

Reader Service #: 308



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KILLER 3D PERFORMANCE[1]



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #106

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #372

RED STORM RISING?

Tom Clancy's New Company Wants To Bring Multiplayer Gaming to the Masses

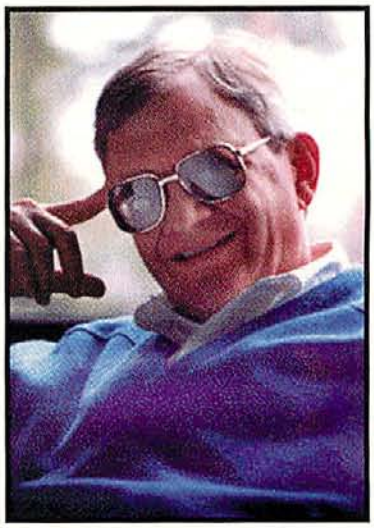
According to an author acquaintance of mine, "Everyone thinks that techno-thrillers comprise a hot genre, but that really isn't the case. Tom Clancy is a hot genre pretty much by himself. If he stopped writing, most of the rest of those novels would go the way of the dinosaurs." One could say the same about the techno-thriller as game—it's been several years since RED STORM RISING (MicroProse) topped the PC best-seller lists. So, why is Tom Clancy moving full-bore into interactive entertainment? According to Clancy, the short answer is, "It's fun."

The long answer is that it's also potentially very lucrative. Red Storm Entertainment is much more than your typical venture-capitalist computer-game startup. Unlike many authors, Clancy *is* a gamer. He cut his gaming teeth on Avalon Hill and *Strategy & Tactics* boardgames, and he has also played a number of computer titles, including THE COLONY by Dave Smith—a complex, late-'80s Mac hit, which opened Clancy's eyes to the possibilities of computer games. Through Smith, Clancy teamed up with the Virtus Corporation to form Red Storm.

According to Clancy, "The PC platform isn't where it needs to be, although Windows 95 helps. What we want is to be on the cutting edge of multiplayer gaming."

When Tom Clancy says that Red Storm will eventually bring PC gaming to the mainstream—the Holy Grail for all computer-game companies—you have to believe it has a better chance than most, if only because Clancy's name on the box ensures a certain degree of market interest.

Red Storm Entertainment's battle plan calls for crafting games that are simple mechanically, but deep in execution, like *Chess* or *Go*. The first release is TOM CLANCY'S POLITIKA, specifically designed for online play. This game focuses on the political free-for-all that would ensue in Russia should Boris Yeltsin step down, and it employs a turn-based motif—actually playtested as a boardgame—that allows for plenty of chat sessions between turns. The result is sort of *Diplomacy* with dice, complete with hard-line KGB operatives, idealistic reformers, the resurgent power of the Church, and even the Russian mafia. Random political events crop up to keep replays from becoming stale.



TOM CLANCY Author as game designer: Can he succeed where so many have failed?

Lest you think that Red Storm simply wants to reinvent the boardgame on the Internet, remember that POLITIKA will be one of the first major Java gaming releases. Also in the works is a top-secret project, code-named POTEMKIN, that both Clancy and Red Storm CEO Doug Littlejohns hint will revolutionize traditional computer strategy gaming. When you consider the military and game design contacts that Clancy has, including his former coauthor Larry Bond (HARPOON), it's hard not to take this new company seriously. Our only regret is that Red Storm evidently won't be doing any Jack Ryan games: Paramount Studios owns those character rights. But the gaming industry, like techno-thrillers, often has plot twists you can't foresee....—*Terry Coleman*



TOM CLANCY'S POLITIKA Soviet political upheaval breeds good-natured Internet gaming conspiracies.



DOUG LITTLEJOHNS This decorated Royal Navy Commodore brings a wealth of military knowledge, personnel-handling skills, and respectability to his position as Red Storm Entertainment's president and CEO. He also makes a good foil for Clancy.

ACES OVER ATLANTA



THIS AIN'T NO SIM: *CGW* simulation writers Robin "Sandman" Kim (silver plane) and Denny "Mitty" Atkin (rear aircraft) fly formation over Atlanta in ex-military T-34A trainers.

In the week preceding E3, Microsoft held a contest in which players took to the virtual skies in a pre-beta version of its FIGHTER ACE online flight sim. The top six players would win the chance to engage in real combat over Atlanta in Skywarriors' laser-equipped T-34A trainers. When the scores were tallied, three of the top four slots went to *CGW* stalwarts: contributors Tom "Thunk" Basham and Robin "Sandman" Kim, and Features/Simulations Editor Denny "Mitty" Atkin. We'll have a full report on the Sandman vs. Mitty flight in next month's issue.

CARMACK KISSES HIS FERRARI GOODBYE

Dennis Fong, also known as Thresh, of the Legends Clan, was crowned DeathMatch king, after battling it out against 15 other finalists in the Red Annihilation Tournament at E3. The tourney—sponsored by Intergraph, id, Rendition, Mplayer, and ClanRing—began back in April, with almost 2000 contestants competing in preliminary DeathMatches over the Internet.

After an intense battle with runner-up Elvin Kimzey, a.k.a. Entropy9, Thresh walked away with the grand prize, a red 1987 Ferrari 328 GTS, donated by id's John Carmack. (Carmack viewed the gift as a way to give something back to the gamers who have contributed to his own success.) Thresh also won an Intergraph TD-20 3D Ultimate Game System—the machine used by the sixteen finalists in the DeathMatch competition.

—Charlotte Panther



Image used by permission of Xtreme Prejudice at www.xtremeprejudice.com

The Winner of the Red Annihilation Tournament, Dennis Fong, a.k.a. Thresh.



THE GRAND PRIZE: John Carmack's 1987 Ferrari 328 GTS.

Pipeline

10th Planet Bethesda	11/97
Aces: X-Fighters Sierra	Christmas 97
Age of Empires Microsoft	10/97
Agents of Justice MicroProse	11/97
AH-64D Longbow 2.0 EA/Jane's	Winter 97-98
Banshee 3DFX	Fall 97
Bass Masters Classic THQ	11/97
Black Dahlia Take 2	Fall 97
Blade Runner Westwood	11/97
Byzantine: The Betrayal Discovery Channel	10/97
Challenge # 2 Smart Games	10/97
Close Combat II Microsoft	11/97
Confirmed Kill Eidos	Fall 97
Curse of Monkey Island LucasArts	Fall 97
Daikatana Ion Storm	11/97
Demon Isle Sierra	10/97
Die by the Sword Interplay	Summer 97
Earthsiege 3 Sierra	Late 97
Epic Warhammer 40K: Redemption SSI	Christmas 97
European Air War MicroProse	Christmas 97
F-16 Aggressor Virgin	Fall 97
F-22 Air Dominance Fighter DID	10/97
F-22 Raptor NovaLogic	Christmas 97
Falcon 4.0 MicroProse	Spring 98
Fallout Interplay	Fall 97
Fighter Squadron Activision	11/97
Flight Unlimited II Looking Glass	Fall 97
FPS Football 98 Sierra	11/97
FPS Skiing Sierra	10/97
Golgotha crack.com	Fall 97
Half-Life Sierra/Valve	Fall 97
Heavy Gear Activision	Fall 97
iF-16 Viper Interactive Magic	Fall 97
Intel740 3D Chip Intel	Christmas 97
Jane's F-15 EA/Jane's	Early 98
Joint Strike Fighter Eidos	10/97
King's Quest: Mask of Eternity Sierra	12/97
Legends '98 Football Accolade	9/97
Madden NFL 98 EA Sports	1/98
Microsoft Baseball 3D Microsoft	10/97
MiG Alley Empire	10/97
Might & Magic VI New World	10/97
Myst 2: Riven Broderbund	Fall 97
NHL 98 EA Sports	11/97
NHL Powerplay 98 Virgin	10/97
Pacific Tide Star	Fall 97
Panzer General II SSI	11/97
Populous III EA/Bullfrog	Fall 97
Prelude to Waterloo TalonSoft	9/97
Prey Apogee/3D Realms	Spring 98
Quake II id/Activision	10/97
Quest For Glory V Sierra	11/97
Redguard Bethesda	Late 97
Return to Krondor 7th Level	Early 98
Screamin' Demons Activision	Winter 97-98
SimCity 3000 Maxis	Christmas 97
SODA Off-Road Racing Papyrus	Fall 97
StarCraft Blizzard	10/97
Starship Titanic Simon & Schuster	10/97
Steel Panthers III SSI	11/97
Su-27 Flanker 2.0 SSI	Winter 97-98
TFX 3 DID	Late 97
Tomb Raider II Eidos	11/97
Tone Rebellion Logic Factory	Fall 97
Trespasser: Jurassic Park DreamWorks	Winter 97-98
Unreal Epic/GT Interactive	Fall 97
WarCraft Adventures Blizzard	12/97
Warhammer II: Dark Omen SSI	11/97
You Don't Know Jack TV Berkeley Systems	10/97
Zork: Grand Inquisitor Activision	Fall 97

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #247

All Aboard the Real-time Bandwagon

Once in a while a game company comes along with a winning formula and, suddenly, everyone else jumps on the "me too" bandwagon. After the success of COMMAND AND CONQUER, we were hardly surprised that every other title we saw at this year's E3 just happened to be a real-time strategy game. Here's a quick look at the ones you can expect to see on store shelves before Christmas. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. In our November issue, we'll have a comprehensive guide to all the real-time strategy games in the works, so that you can find out which games are really worth shelling out for.

Age of Empires	Microsoft
Army Men	3DO
Captives	Sierra
Close Combat 2	Microsoft
Conquest Earth	Eidos
Constructor	Acclaim
Dark Colony	SSI
Dark Omen	SSI
Dark Reign	Activision
Dominion	7th Level
Dungeon Keeper	Bullfrog
Evolution	Discovery
Gettysburg	Firaxis
MAX 2	Interplay
Myth	Bungie
Netstorm	Activision
Outpost 2	Sierra
Pax 2	THQ
Populous III	Bullfrog
Rebellion	LucasArts
SimCity 3000	Maxis
StarCraft	Blizzard
Stratosphere	Acclaim
Total Annihilation	GT Interactive
WarGames	MGM Interactive
War Wind II	SSI



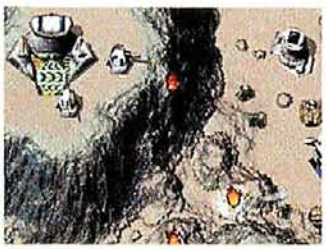
WarGames



Netstorm



Conquest Earth



Total Annihilation



SimCity 3000



Outpost 2

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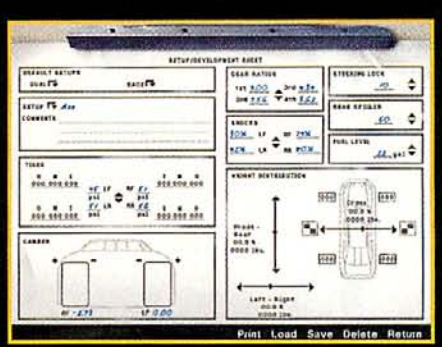
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #363

Where Are They Now?

If these titles sound familiar, that's because we've been talking about them for more than a year. Yes, these are the games we were looking at in our post-E3 fall forecast *last* year, while we were still going under the assumption that each would ship by Christmas 1996. At press time, a few of the games were close to release, some of them were still a long way off, and others had disappeared altogether. Can you say VaporWare?

Title	Company	Genre	Ship Date
Agents of Justice	MicroProse	Strategy	November '97
Blade Runner	Westwood	Adventure	November '97
Dark Earth	Kalisto	RPG	September '97
Dog Eat Dog	Trilobyte	Adventure	On hold
Falcon 4.0	MicroProse	Sim	Spring '98
The Indestructibles	EA/BullFrog	RPG	Dead
Into the Shadows	Scavenger/GT	Action	Dead
The Island of Dr. Moreau	Psygnosis	Adventure	Fall '97
Lands of Lore II	Westwood	RPG	October '97
NFL Legends Football	Accolade	Sports	September '97
Planetfall	Activision	Adventure	Dead
Return to Krondor	7th Level	RPG	January '98
Space Bunnies Must Die	Flux	Action	Dead
Star Fleet Academy	Interplay	Space Sim	Summer '97
StarCraft	Blizzard	Strategy/Adventure	October '97
Ultima Online	Origin	RPG	Fall '97



Agents of Justice



Falcon 4.0



StarCraft



Lands of Lore II

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #257

News Flash

Hipnotic Interactive, developer of QUAKE MISSION PACK NO.1: SCOURGE OF ARMAGON, recently announced that it has changed its name to **Ritual Entertainment**, following a trademark dispute. The old name was too similar to one already being used by another game developer, **Hypnotix** (which developed WETLANDS for **New World Computing**). Despite the different spelling of its name, Hipnotic was unable get around the trademark issue. Ritual is currently developing SIN, a first-person 3D action game using the QUAKE engine, to be published by **Activision**.

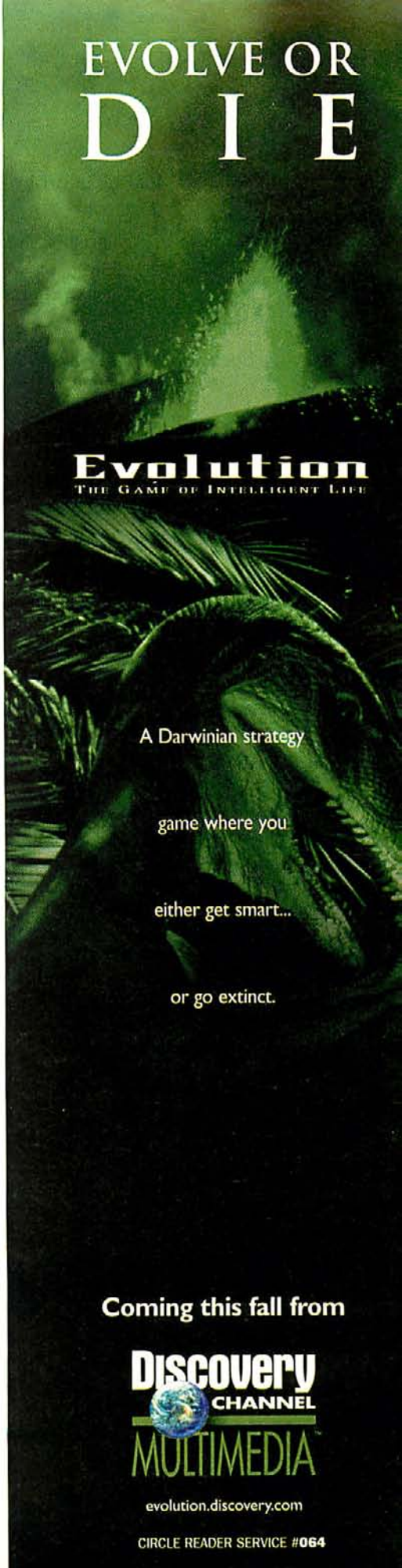
Electronic Arts recently entered into an agreement with SIMCITY developer **Maxis** to acquire the company for approximately $125 million in stock. Maxis stands to benefit greatly from EA's extensive worldwide distribution agreements, while EA can look forward to adding the highly successful franchise of SIM products, including the flagship title SIMCITY, to its line-up. The merger is expected to be completed by the end of August 1997. Electronic Arts also recently announced the appointment of former **Virgin Interactive** executives Neil Young and Chris Yates to manage the company's Texas-based studio, **Origin**. Young will serve as vice president and general manager of Origin. Yates has been named vice president and chief technology officer. Prior to working at Virgin, Yates was vice president of research and development at **Westwood Studios**.

Virgin Interactive has announced a new domestic publishing agreement with **Capcom** that will enable it to publish the best-selling PlayStation title, RESIDENT EVIL, on the PC. Available from Virgin this summer, the PC version of the contemporary horror story promises to deliver the same intense gameplay as the PlayStation title, and will have 3D-acceleration support for Rendition, 3Dfx, and PowerVR, among others.

Some of the industry's best-known game developers recently released an open letter to **Microsoft**, urging the company to actively support the OpenGL 3D API for Windows 95 and Windows NT games. The group, which included **id Software**'s John Carmack and John Romero from **Ion Storm**, indicated that they would find the means to use OpenGL as the hardware API in many upcoming products, whether or not Microsoft supported it. Because of Microsoft's control over the operating systems, however, it would make life easier for developers if Microsoft agreed to work with them to provide OpenGL on its platforms. As of press time, Microsoft had not responded to the letter.

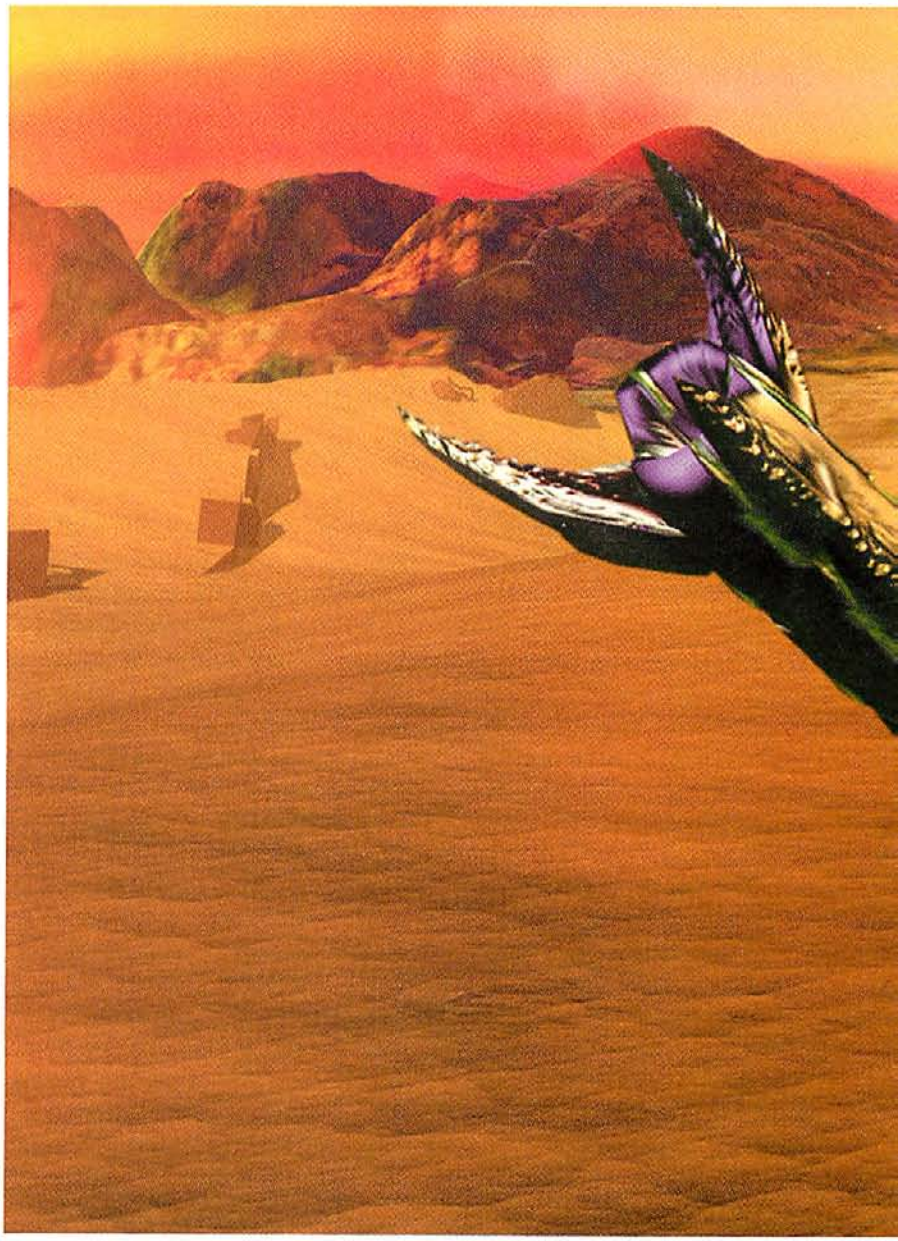
Forgotten Realms' popular *AD&D* role-playing game NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, which has been available free to subscribers on AOL's Games Channel, may be removed from the service when **WorldPlay** (formerly **Imagi-Nation Network**) becomes the primary programmer for premium games on the Games Channel. Responding to the cries of disappointed gamers, **Engage Games**, which owns the online license to NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, is looking into ways to bring the game back to the Web. The transition will not be easy, as the game's code is five or six years old and will require a considerable overhaul to make it stable. Another option is to revamp the product completely, but either solution could result in a loss of continuity within the game. GEMSTONE III, another popular role-playing game that faced the same dilemma, has been moved to the Web and is now available through **Simutronics.** As of press time, the future of NEVERWINTER NIGHTS was still in question.

Red Orb recently announced the name of the next installment in its JOURNEYMAN PROJECT series. THE JOURNEYMAN PROJECT 3 will be subtitled LEGACY OF TIME, and will continue where its predecessor, BURIED IN TIME, left off, following the heroic exploits of Agent 5, Gage Blackwood. As you travel through the ages to investigate a historical time distortion, you'll find yourself untangling an intricate web of puzzles, on your search for clues critical to the survival of mankind. LEGACY OF TIME is scheduled for release right after this Christmas.



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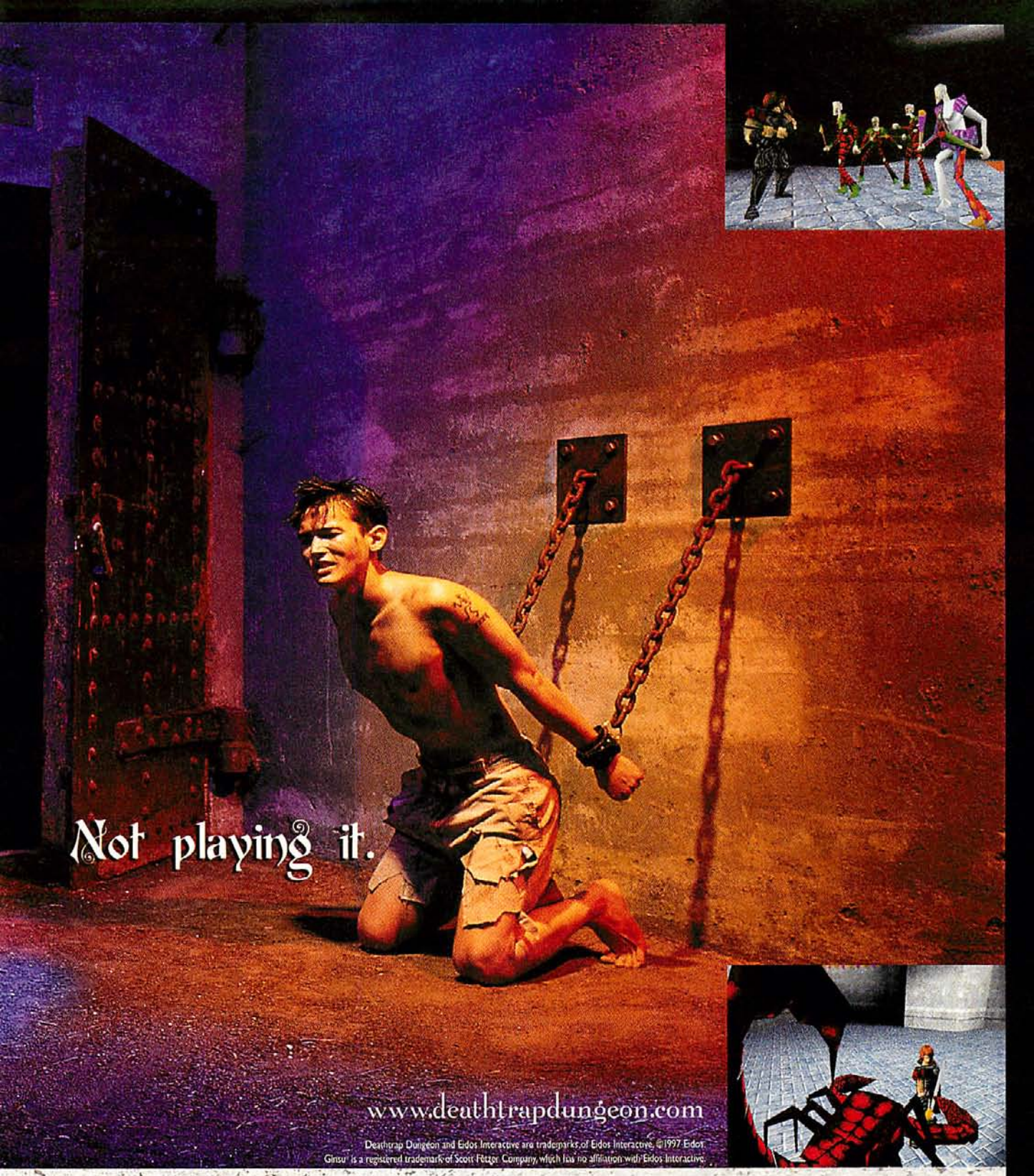
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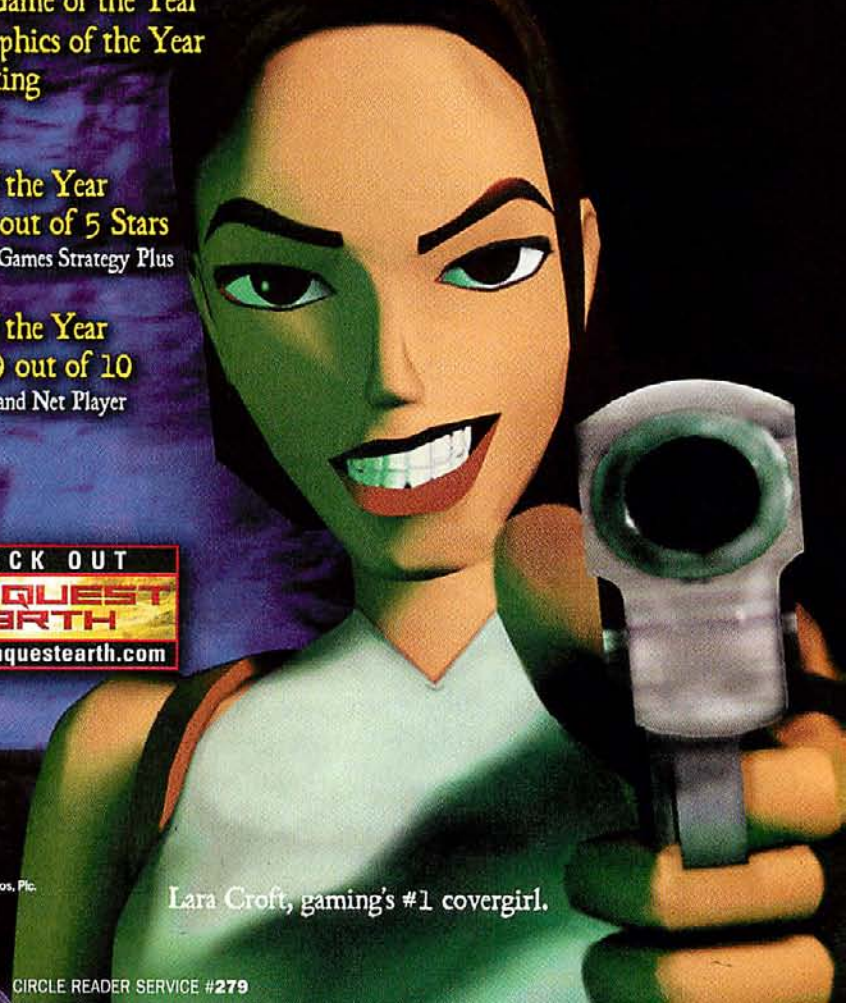
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EIDOS INTERACTIVE

You've been warned.

Target Release Date: Fourth Quarter 1997
Developer: Bungie
Publisher: Bungie

Fantasy for Grown-Ups

Bungie Plans To Take Real-time Strategy Gaming Into the Third Dimension

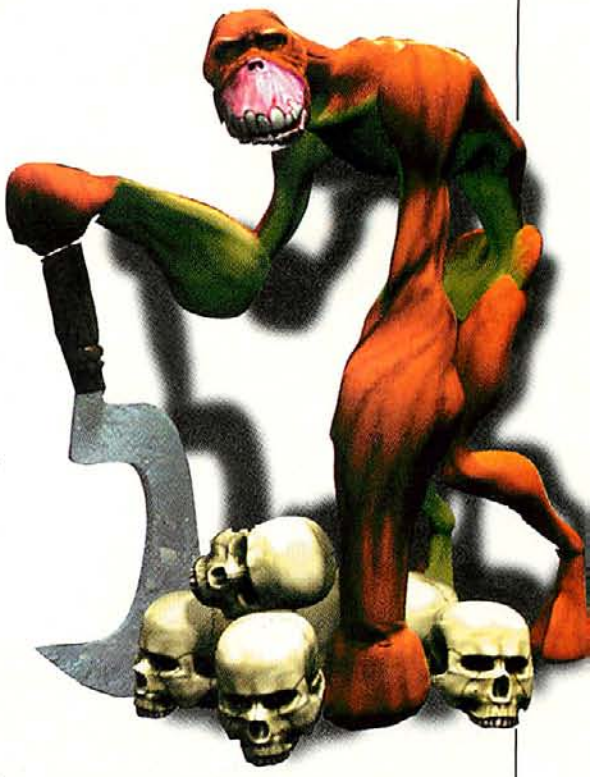
by Martin E. Cirulis

No, folks, this article's title doesn't refer to a game that involves helping supermodels figure out how to get out of their wet cheerleader outfits. It's about a thing rarely found in the realm of computer games: High Fantasy that doesn't insult one's intelligence or maturity. While your next assumption might be that I am talking about a CRPG or adventure game, the reality is that MYTH: THE FALLEN LORDS is a tactical level wargame.

Previous journeys into the realm of real-time fantasy games have yielded such simple giants as WARCRAFT and such underappreciated gems as WARHAMMER. In actual game mechanics and tone, MYTH resembles the latter, being a real-time tactical battle game with a taste of traditional tabletop miniatures wargaming—but it combines serious attitude and style with some of the slickest and most detailed graphics I've ever seen in a strategy game. If Bungie (of Mac MARATHON fame), the company bringing us this potential gem, can keep up the standard of quality and not fall prey to trivializing the dark drama of its subject matter, MYTH may just be the kind of breakthrough title for "serious" fantasy wargames that DOOM was for first-person shooters.

IT'S NOT YOUR FATHER'S D&D

The first thing you notice about MYTH is that it isn't another one of those clichéd Elf/Dwarf/Orc universes, where the rationale for everything is basically "They fight because Tolkien said so." MYTH, in contrast, seems to draw its inspiration from darker, more complex and realistic fantasy fiction, to provide a gaming universe that makes you want to play the game as much as it makes you want to plunge into the battles themselves. While there is no official credit given, it's obvious that someone on the design team was a fan of Glen Cook's *Black Company* series, as this game carries with it that same blend of politics, combat, and twisted dark magic.



THE GHOL A minion of the evil Fallen. The Forces of Light must try to stop their unrelenting expansion.

Scenarios and campaigns are the most realistic I have seen so far, and have a complexity that includes everything from betrayal to winter storms. And these things are not simply props to hang a battle on; they are dynamic processes within the scenario, which beg gamer reaction. I wasn't able to play through the complete set of scenarios that will be included in the final edition of the game, but the ones I did play were up to the highest standards of the genre.

The traditional Light vs. Darkness motif moves the action in MYTH, but the units

AN INTERVIEW WITH BUNGIE

The revolutionary 3D engine isn't the only surprise Bungie has in store for gamers. They hope to create a more compelling single-player campaign, with story- and performance-driven scenarios. We were able to ask Bungie to expound on their ideas.

CGW: *What will the single-player campaign be like? Will performance in one mission influence the next scenario?*

Bungie: Absolutely. We will allow experienced units from one level to advance and replace green units that you would have begun with on the next. That's the first part of the continuity planned for the game; the other is having unkilled enemies show up on subsequent levels, and this is also in the works.

involved are nicely varied and drawn from more esoteric sources than those in your usual fantasy game. The Forces of Darkness are big on the undead, but instead of the standard zombies and vampires, there are beings that spread rot and corruption when killed, floating undead held aloft by their own decomposition gases, and possessed spearmen who throw poisoned barbs, just to name a few. The Forces of Light have somewhat more traditional troops—archers, armored warriors, and such—but they are so stylized and detailed that they fit right in alongside the Treemen and Dwarven grenadiers.

No fantasy game is complete without magic, artifacts, enchanted weapons, and heroes, and MYTH is no exception. Once again, the designers have deftly sidestepped tired clichés by lifting some of the more interesting and obscure items from classic mythology and combining them with ideas of their own. I especially like the Evil Heroes, who hover somewhere between champion and demigod and have a fascinating resemblance to Cook's Ten-Who-Were-Taken.

BLOOD ON THE SNOW

Of course, all this would be so much window dressing without one of the best combat and graphics engines yet seen in a real-time wargame.

Every individual is fully represented and can be commanded through your basic point-and-click interface. You can use reference keys to set groups of units in certain formations and, even more important—unlike other games of this type—the formations actually *work*. Forming a wedge of swordsmen backed by a line of Fir-Bolg archers works in the game as it would in real life. While the fact that each unit is modeled down to factors such as facing and morale means that you won't be seeing any fantasy versions of the Battles of Alexander (i.e., fights involving 80,000 men), midsize skirmishes of all kinds abound.

Although WARHAMMER tried to cover the same tactical base, it was slow and the graphics were a little uninspiring. MYTH narrows the focus a bit, while increasing speed and jumping the graphics up to the same 3D level that only QUAKE gamers have been enjoying so far. Bungie has done such a good job with terrain and atmospheric effects that they are more like characters in the game than special effects. The ground is changeable, craters form, grass gets scorched and burns away, tracks are left in



MYTH-ING IN ACTION Seasons will change in the campaign, and the terrain will be interactive. Limbs will stay on the ground, and snow will cover tracks.



IT CAME FROM THE DEEP Among the cool features is one that allows you to hide in the water.



BLOODY HELL The 3D engine will allow for terrain bonuses. These archers receive attack and range bonuses for being on higher ground, enabling them to paint the ground red with their enemies' blood.

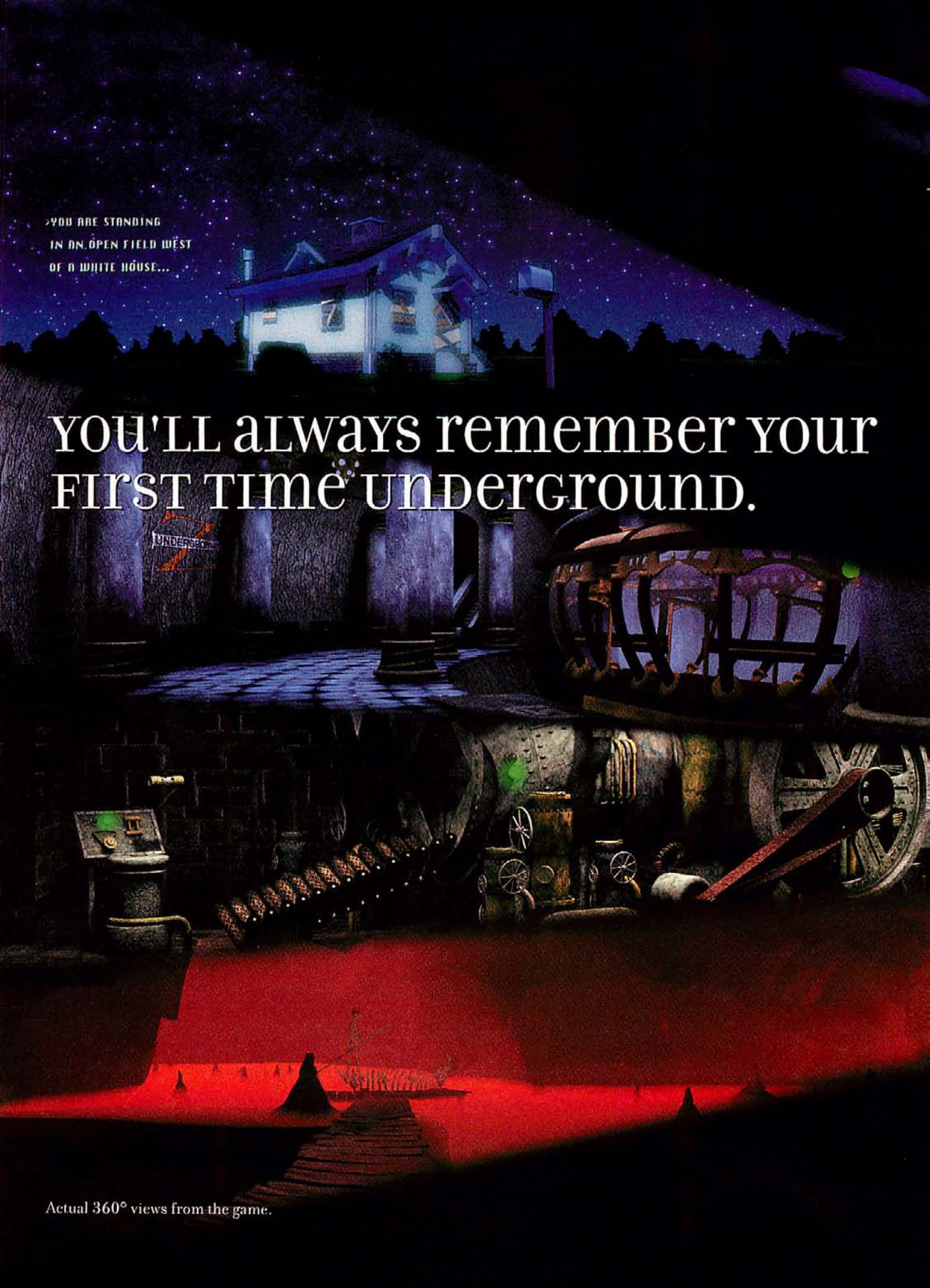
CGW: *What's innovative or new in your campaign design?*

Bungie: One unconventional aspect is that gamers will have to figure out for themselves how to finish levels, sometimes despite the instructions they're given.

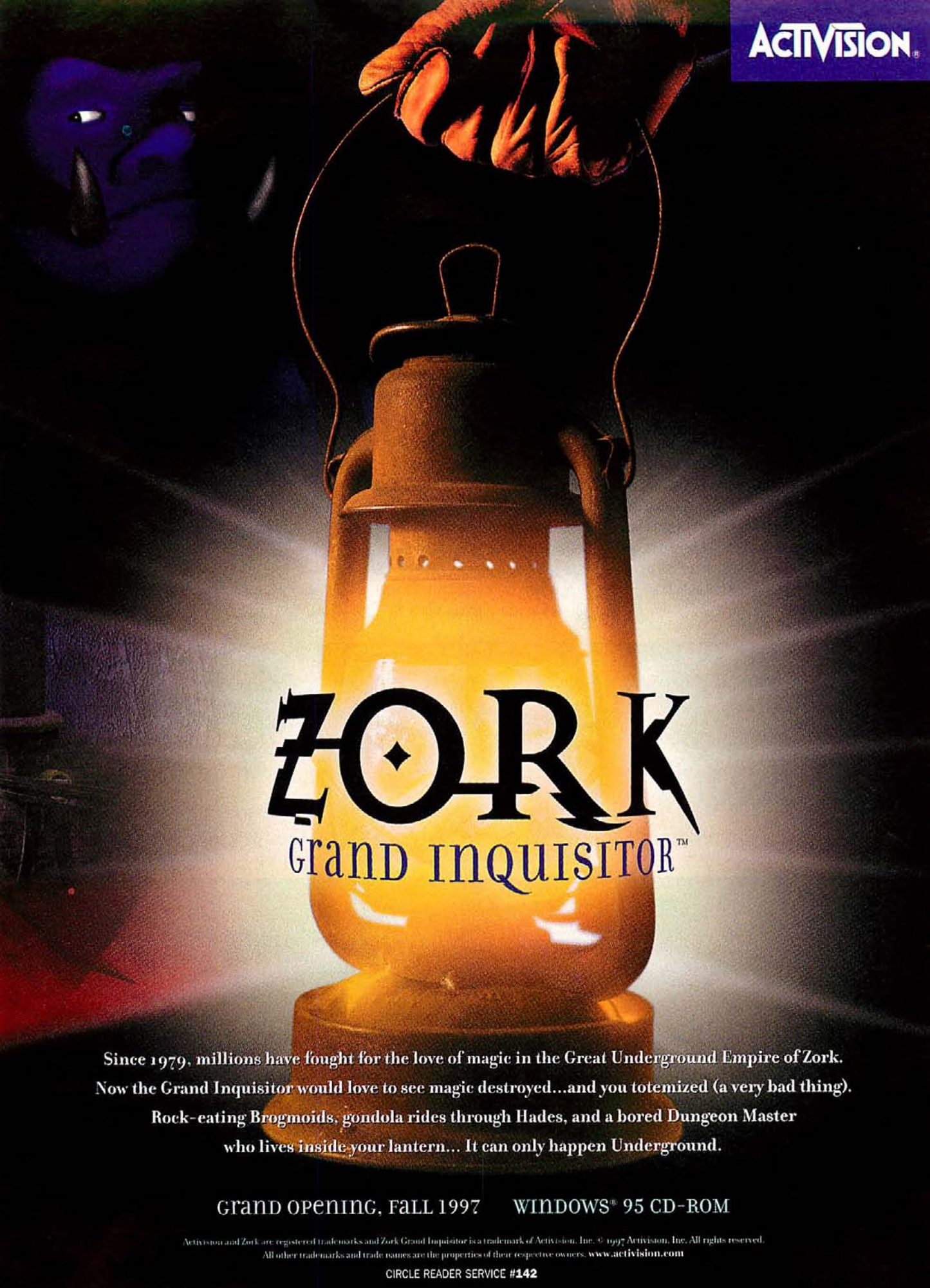
For example, on level 4, Return to Covenant, the Light has sent a band of scouts to retrieve The Total Codex, a tome of great Power. The scouts are besieged by the forces of one of the Fallen and are in danger of losing the Codex to him. At the beginning of the level, the gamer is told that the plan is to fight through the siege lines, secure the Codex, and bring it back to safety through a World Knot (basically a magical teleporter).

But, once the gamer has managed to get the Codex and starts running for the Knot, he'll find irresistible waves of Thrall blocking his way. He'll probably try a couple of times to kill or divert all of the Thrall, but it won't work. The only way to live is to turn and run, escaping via a road along the Chalk Cliffs, whereupon the level will end and the gamer will advance.

After this has happened a few times a gamer will figure out that the world he's in is more complex



Actual 360° views from the game.


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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #142

the snow and can be followed, and even snowfall is modeled as it fills in those tracks. The moment when the enemy emerges from the translucent fog is enough to convince you that you are fighting a tactical wargame with a whole new level of environmental realism. Units struggle through rough terrain or up slopes, archers have greater range from the heights, units can hide behind trees, and body parts even roll downhill.

LOOKING GOOD

At this point, the only major reservation I have about MYTH is that there seems to be no plan for a dynamic mission builder, something a game like this desperately needs, both to increase replay value and to let gamers get the most out of the battle engine. Without this, the current number of set scenarios seems a bit small. Bungie compensates for this somewhat with the excellent multiplayer suite and its own version of battle.net, where gamers will be able to create large multiplayer battles to their heart's content.

Perhaps a later expansion could introduce a mission builder, along with a terrain editor and some new units. While there are 20 different types of units at the moment, MYTH seems like the type of game that deserves as much variety as possible. The interface is smooth, and the only quibble I have is that the game needs one more level of zoom—as it is, your eye seems to hover 20 or 30 feet from the surface, and that can be a problem in trees or steep terrain.

Unless an unforeseen disaster should strike in the form of Murphy's Law—or Bungie tries to sanitize its wonderfully dark world to attract a younger audience—I feel confident in setting my hopes on this one. Certainly if you have any interest in fantasy wargaming, miniatures battles, or tactical simulations that are slightly off the beaten track, then start saving your pennies, because if Bungie stays on course, MYTH will land squarely in your must-buy sights.



STUMPED Here is a look at one of the Light side's Treemen—giant, treelike humanoids.



MY TURN Among the many features of the full 3D engine is a free camera that can rotate and zoom at the gamer's whim, which benefits your observation of the game and helps immensely in forming your strategy.

and variable than what's been laid out in the brief instructions to each level.

Finally, on a couple of levels the game is not strictly linear. There are at least two levels where if the gamer wins with a comfortable margin, he'll have the option of skipping the next level and moving on with the story.

CGW: *How do you acquire units in the game? Are some restricted in the beginning of the game and will there be units that become available only as you advance in the campaign?*

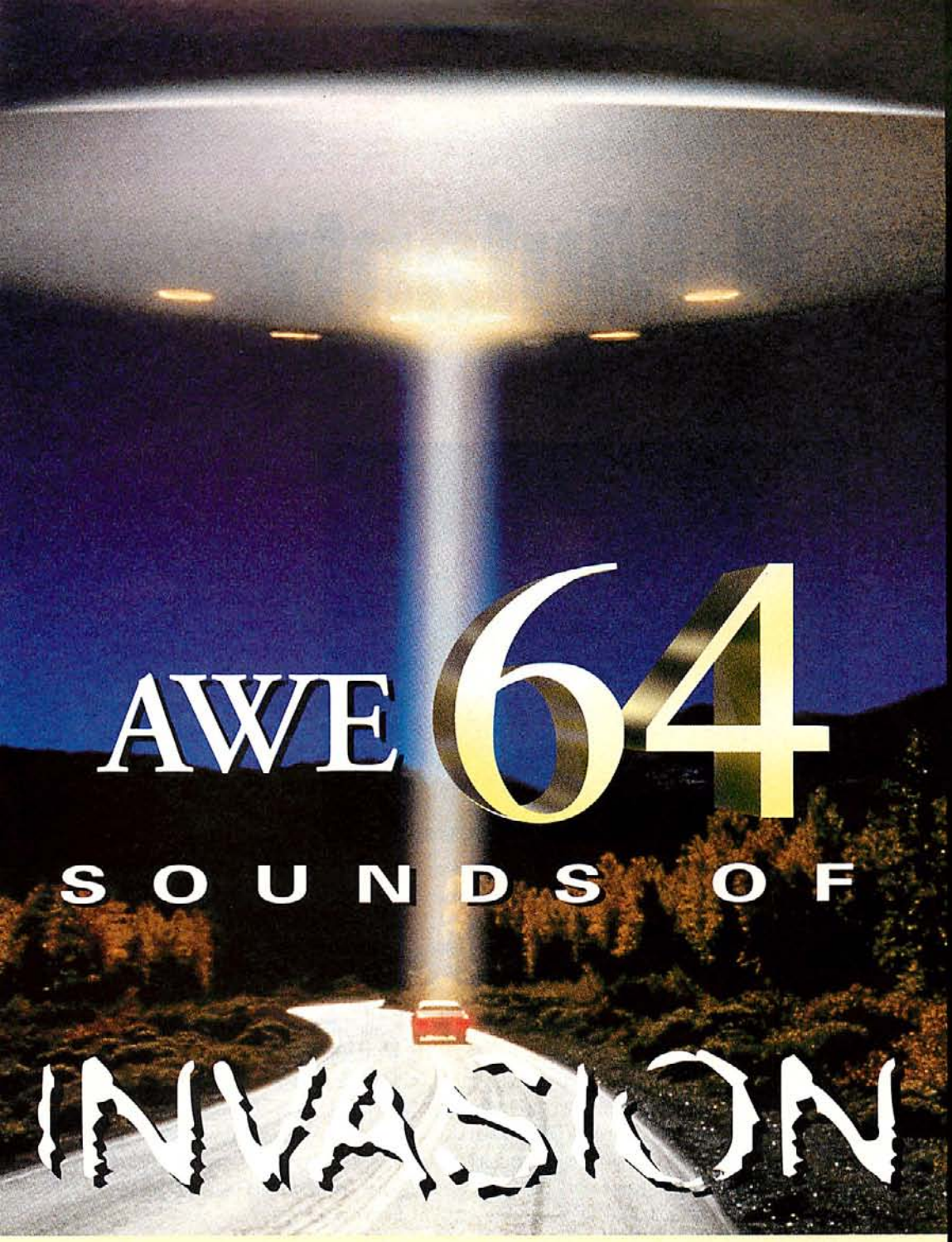
Bungie: Each level begins with a preset number of units, which are appropriate to the region you're fighting in and the difficulty level you're playing on—more difficulty, fewer units. You'll start out with basic units like Warriors and Fir-Bolg archers; gradually, stronger ones like Berserks and Avatara will become part of your forces. On some levels you'll get reinforcements when you've progressed enough.

In the net game, we're planning on a "draft" system of allocating units, giving each gamer points to spend on acquiring units of various strengths, in order to eliminate the monotony of battling against a predictable adversary.

CGW: *How does the experience point system work?*

Bungie: Units get markers in their status bar every time they get a kill: For the Light, the markers are shields; for the Dark, skulls. Every kill earned allows the unit to attack more quickly, with greater accuracy and the ability to inflict more damage. Thus, highly experienced units are the best attackers and are also the most important to protect.

When they're inexperienced, units are interchangeable, but once an archer has, say, 10 kills, he hits nearly everything he shoots at and is far more devastating than a standard archer.



1. "We Come In Peace."
2. Blasting Ray Guns.
3. People Screaming.
4. "You Must Believe Me!"
5. Exploding Buildings.
6. Whirring Space Ships.
7. Brains Being Sucked.
8. Bones Crunching.
9. Aliens Phoning Home.
10. Metallic Scraping.
11. Cars Crashing.
12. Kidneys Bursting.
13. Insertion of Probes.
14. Heads Exploding.
15. "Run for Cover!"
16. "Warning."
17. Aliens Melting.
18. Pods Hatching.
19. Destroying the Monster.
20. Buildings Imploding.
21. Spaceships Docking.
22. Boiling Flesh.
23. "Mayday, Mayday!"
24. Exploding Spaceship.
25. People Running.
26. "I saw a UFO!"
27. Planes Taking Off.
28. "We're at DefCon 4."
29. Aliens Communicating.
30. Children Crying.
31. Slurp.
32. Clinking of Autopsy Instruments.
33. Laser Swords Crashing.
34. "Hyperspace!"
35. Flesh Being Torn Off Bones.
36. "They're Coming."
37. Wailing Sirens.
38. "You Must Die."
39. "Beam Me Up."
40. Zap!!!
41. Air Locks Closing.
42. "Oh, My God!"
43. Lasers Charging Up.
44. "We Need More Power!"
45. Ray Guns Blasting.
46. Calling the Mothership.
47. Horns Blaring.
48. "We Won!"
49. "Lock on Target!"
50. Crystals Charging.
51. Area 51 Guard: "No Admittance."
52. Zap-Zap!
53. Warning Alarms.
54. Air Locks Opening.
55. "Set to Stun!"
56. "Red Alert!"
57. Shields Up.
58. Warp Speed.
59. "Blast 'em!"
60. Eyeballs Squishing.
61. Spaceships Cloaking.
62. Radar Ping.
63. "Fire at Will!"
64. "Take Me to Your Leader."

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #**078**

Target Release Date: Fall 1997
Developer: Interplay
Publisher: Interplay

Boyz II Mutantz

Interplay's "Spiritual Successor" to WASTELANDS Looks Promising

by Thierry Nguyen

Here's the situation: I'm just wandering around, minding my own business. Then, this punk walks by and starts yammering about how I'm trespassing on private property. Of course, I ignore him. So then he decides to whip out his 9mm and start taking potshots at me. By that time, I already have mine out, and I just shoot him in the kneecaps. Then I end his existence with a bullet to the head.

Such is a typical scene in Interplay's new RPG: FALLOUT, a character-driven game that takes place in a post-nuclear holocaust California. Using the vision of postapocalyptic life propagated by 1950s America, rather than the vision in the *Terminator* films (which games so commonly use), FALLOUT already gives us a unique style and setting, which is just the start. People consider it the unofficial sequel to the ten-year-old classic, WASTELANDS, and it could be one of the better RPGs to be released this year.



YOU TALKIN' TO ME? Dialogues such as this one indicate that a quest is upcoming. Be careful what you say, as the character will react to your words.

ISN'T THAT S.P.E.C.I.A.L.

One thing that FALLOUT concentrates on is character definition. You can choose to play the game with three pregenerated characters (a fighter, a thief, and a diplomat), or you can craft your own character. While it doesn't have DAGGERFALL's staggering complexity of classes, races, and skills, FALLOUT manages to make a pretty good skills-based character system.

S.P.E.C.I.A.L. is the acronym that lists all the generally static attributes. It stands for Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility, and Luck. These attributes form the foundation of your character. In fact, you can modify them only during creation. Once you start the game, the stats you pick stay that way.



I'M SO S.P.E.C.I.A.L. Here, I'm focusing on a combat-intensive character—concentrating on combat skills, buffing up my physique via traits and attributes, and making myself a "bloody mess."

Adjusting your attributes determines the general percentages for skills, which is the heart of the game. Every character has the same set of skills; it is how proficient they are at individual skills that makes each character unique. The skills range from handling different weapons to abilities such as stealthiness and lock-picking. When you create your character, you pick three skills to "boost" and gain some proficiency in. Whenever you level up, you get points and can distribute them among skills. So, a fighter would concentrate on the combat-intensive skills, while the lawyer would opt to improve skills such as speech, bartering, and gambling.

After skills come character traits. You get to choose 2 traits from a menu of 16, and these traits will further round out your character. Traits range from mundane ones such as "bruiser" (bigger and stronger but slower) to interesting ones such as "drug addict" (the drugs last longer and better, but you need them like water).

One trait that I found amusing, though not very useful in actual character development, was "bloody mess," in which you kill people in the most violent ways.

Finally, the last customization of your character comes in "perks." Every three or four levels (depending on which traits you adopt), you get to pick a perk that will hone some of your skills even further. Among the numerous perks are "awareness" for better perception, "explorer" for wandering the gameworld, and "master trader" for bartering.

heroin
s & m
unfiltered cigs
binge drinking
creamed corn
one night stands

hell, what's left?





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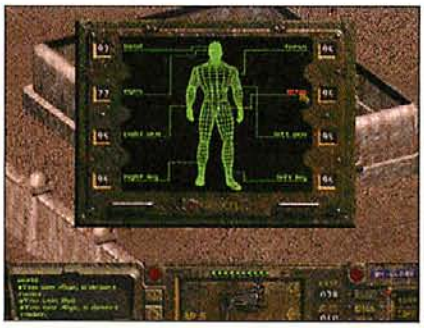
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #071



CALIFORNIA DREAMIN' The world of FALLOUT is the decimated region of Southern California. This map will serve as your primary interface as you wander the world.



BELOW THE BELT Targeting in FALLOUT is quite good, as each region can have different effects on your enemy, and you have different chances of hitting it.



I GOTS SKILLS Use of the skills outlined in character generation is simply a matter of pulling up a menu and making the skill active.

A BLOODIER DIABLO

Once you make your character, you step out of the Vault and into a game world similar to that of DIABLO. That is, you get a three-quarter perspective on your surroundings in SVGA-graphics. This is the dominant viewpoint system of the game, as exploration, dialogue, and combat take place in this viewpoint. But the view system is the only mirror of DIABLO here.

Combat is where FALLOUT shows its gritty violence. If you have both the game option of "maximum blood" plus the character trait of "bloody mess," expect to see instances like punching someone's stomach out, or shooting them into bloody chunks with your machine gun. Even when I killed a giant rat with the simple pistol you get in the beginning, the extra gory touch resulted in one side of its head being completely blown off and its brains flying out. FALLOUT could even surpass CRUSADER in graphic violence.

NPC conversations range from simple one-liners that appear over the person's head to full, facial dialogues. The facial dialogues usually are reserved for characters with a quest for you, and one of FALLOUT's selling points are the facial expressions, which change based on what you say and how you act. It is actually pretty entertaining to see someone greet you with a friendly "Hello," and then get angry when you say something to the effect of "You're a complete wuss."

ONWARD WITH A QUEST...

FALLOUT begins with the simple quest: You have to retrieve a replacement water-chip for your Vault. The Overseer gives you 150 days to finish this quest, and you are sent on your merry way. While this is the main quest of the game, there are numerous side-quests you can take. The ones I've actually seen are typical item retrievals, like "Get rad-scorpion tail to make antivenom with" or "Rescue hostage from bandits." While there will be many boring quests, there are some genuinely intriguing ones as well. From what I've played, the best quest so far was where I had to join the Brotherhood of Steel in order to go undercover and see if they were behind the attacks on a certain town. Other quests include: assassination, getting someone to incriminate himself, and either solving or *causing* a city crisis. And while things do get more complicated than finding a simple chip, I don't want to ruin the plot for you yet.

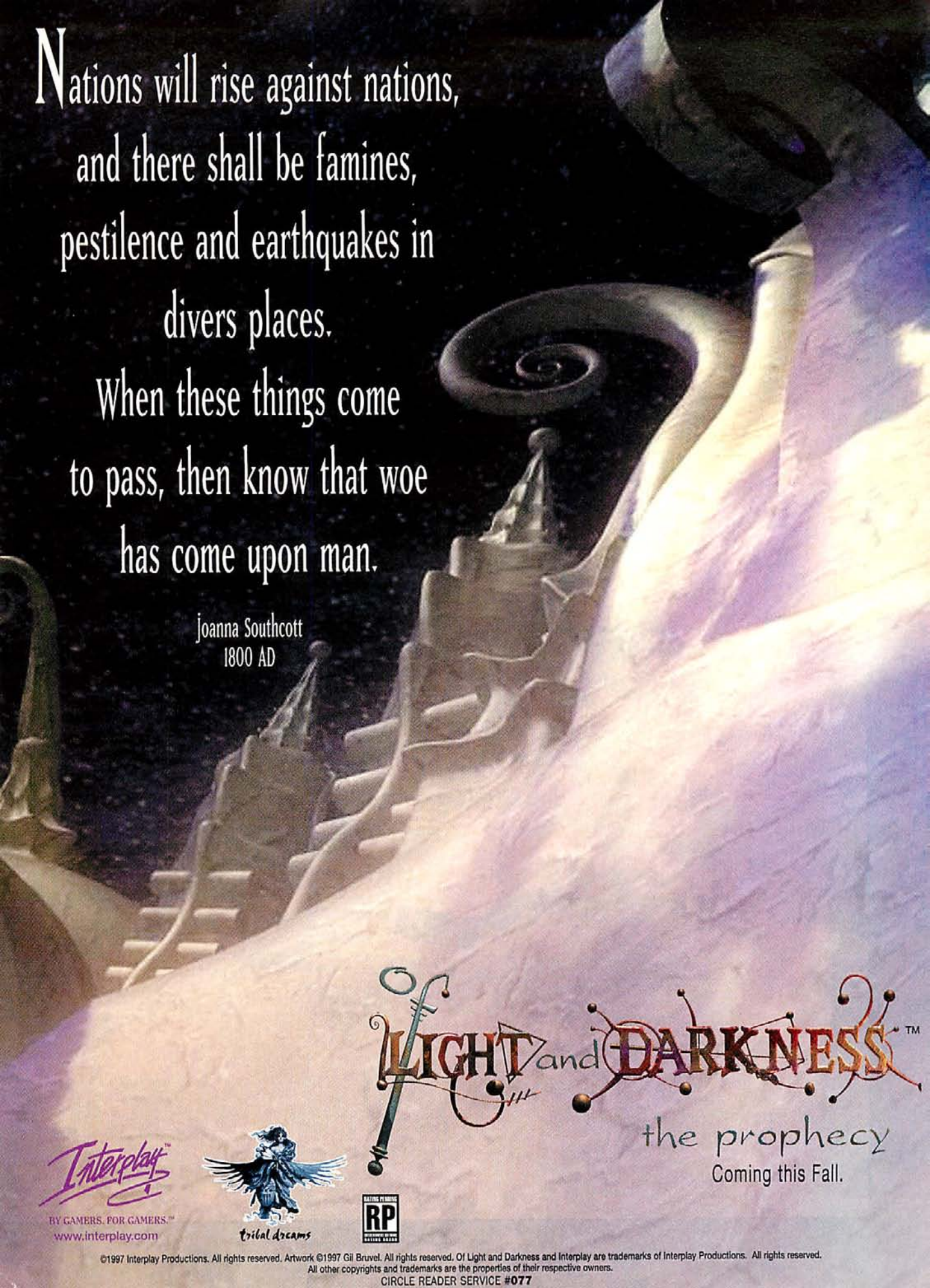
The only real negatives for FALLOUT are some minor quibbles, which will hopefully be corrected by the time it's released, and its graphic violence, but that can be tweaked to make the game less blood-drenched. All in all, FALLOUT looks to be a promising RPG, with a nice emphasis on character development, a good take on setting (the first nuclear holocaust with doo-wop playing in the background) and more quest variety than the typical quests of many recent RPGs.

X-COM Meets DIABLO

Even though FALLOUT has the look of DIABLO, it has the combat of X-COM. The turn-based combat here is based on the movement point system, where you have a limited number of points and each action costs you a certain amount of points. Combat is initiated when an enemy spots you and walks up to you, or when you take a potshot at an enemy.

While at first disconcerting, the turn-based combat is pretty good. It gave me time to think through my options before doing anything rash. One cool aspect of combat is the aimed shot, where instead of just hitting someone, you target a specific place. Certain places cause critical damage (like hitting a guy "below the belt"), while others will usually cripple them (hitting the legs or the eyes).

Also, sometimes you may have an NPC who will tag along and help you in various tasks. During combat, you have no control over your NPC, however. He will simply do his own thing in combat. Currently, the AI is decent, as the NPC will go for the biggest threat based on the NPC's current condition (for example, if the NPC is wounded, it won't go after a scorpion) Also, the NPC can sometimes get the last shot in for the kill. The enemy AI is smart enough to attempt retreat when the going gets tough. All in all, the combat is good, even though it's a bit foreign, thanks to DIABLO conditioning us to realtime.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #077

CLONING SHEEP
DON'T MEAN JACK.



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Target Release Date: September 1997
Developer: Digital Integration
Publisher: Interactive Magic

Mid-air Precision

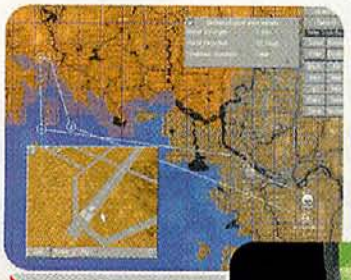
iF-16 Aims Squarely at the Middle of the Flight Sim Road

by Denny Atkin

Originally slated for release last year, this F-16 Fighting Falcon sim comes from the creators of F-16 COMBAT PILOT, an early standard-setter on EGA and Amiga systems. Delays in developer Digital Integration's previous product, HIND, as well as the decision to upgrade the sim's graphics engine, resulted in iF-16's delivery date slipping to this fall. Unfortunately, the delayed product is no longer state-of-the-art. Still, indications from our preview copy are that the game, while not a standard-setter, has plenty to offer the sim fan

NATO FIGHTER

Instead of simulating a fresh-from-the-factory plane, iF-16 simulates an early-model F-16 that's been through the Mid-Life Update (MLU) program. Among other enhancements, this adds color Multi-Function Displays (MFDs) and Low-Altitude Navigation and Targeting Infra-Red system for Night (LANTIRN) pods. Some of the MLU updates haven't even been purchased by the U.S. Air Force yet (although they're slated to go into some European F-16s), so the virtual fighter you fly will in some respects be better equipped than the real thing.



FLIGHT PLAN The Mission Planner lets you alter waypoints and adjust wingman commands before flight.

The MFDs have seven modes: flight information, weapons management, moving map, radar, LANTIRN targeting, autopilot, and aircraft fault status. The real F-16 has an overwhelming number of radar modes, but iF-16 chooses to keep things simple by modeling just two each of the air-to-air and air-to-ground modes. In air combat, Track While Scan (TWS), which can track up to 10 targets, and Air Combat Mode (ACM), designed for homing in on the nearest threat, are available. While the radar systems are somewhat simplified, there's plenty here for the experienced pilot who wants to play with options such as enabling Raid Cluster Resolution or adjusting the radar scan azimuth.



NEW PANELING iF-16 simulates the MLU instrument package, which includes color multi-function displays.

The LANTIRN system not only gives you laser targeting capabilities and night vision, it also adds a terrain-following autopilot mode that makes it much easier to slip below enemy radar coverage. All the available instruments and targeting tools are explained in detail in the sim's manual.

Your F-16 is equipped with a full complement of modern armaments, including AIM-9 Sidewinder and AIM-120 AMRAAM air-to-air missiles; laser-guided and IR Maverick air-to-ground missiles; HARM antiradar missiles; and general-purpose, retarded, and laser-guided bombs. You'll also find Durandel antirunway bombs, rocket pods, cluster bombs, a mine dispenser, and an external 30mm cannon pod for those stressful days when 20mm just isn't enough. Basically, if there's something you want to blow up, you have the necessary equipment to do the job. You have full control of your weapons load, and you can also adjust default salvo sizes for bombs before taking off.



NIGHT RIDER The F-16's LANTIRN allows you to fly night-attack missions.

Cockpit viewing systems weren't complete in the beta I tested. The current version has a virtual cockpit, but the exact implementation of a padlock and fixed views remains to be seen.

Damage modeling is very good. While some simpler sims display just a percentage of damage, iF-16 models individual system failures. Engine damage can result in a loss of thrust; radar, ECM, and FLIR systems can be knocked



out; and even cockpit pressurization can be lost (at which point you'll need to descend below 12,000 feet or lose consciousness). Even in its preliminary form, flight modeling looks good, with performance varying with different weapons loads and at various altitudes.

CAMPAIGN PROMISES

The sim includes three scenarios, all of which seem possible in today's political environment: an Israeli-Syrian conflict, a Turkish-Greek conflict over Cyprus, and a North Korean invasion of South Korea. In each area, you can choose to fly single missions, or a nondynamic campaign consisting of a series of scripted missions. In addition, there are training and instant-action modes. Missions are varied, with a realistic mix of air-to-air, close support, air-to-ground, and even reconnaissance scenarios.

While there's no way to create your own missions from scratch—an unfortunate omission in a sim with a canned campaign—you can use the mission planner screen to alter your flight's waypoints and actions on both ingress and egress. In addition to setting their pre-takeoff orders, you can give wingmen basic orders in the air, including "Attack my target," "Help me," "Follow me," and "Resume flight plan."

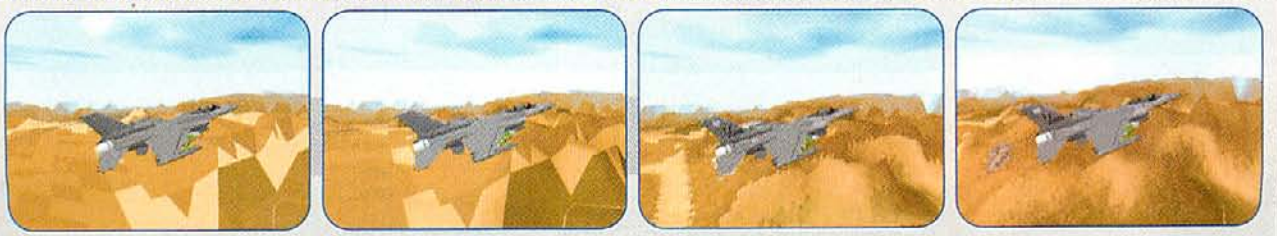
iF-16 promises both head-to-head modem play and 16-player network combat, although it wasn't fully implemented in the version I tested. In head-to-head mode, you can fly cooperative single missions or engage in a duel. Network mode supports deathmatch, "every pilot for himself" play, or a capture-the-flag mode in which your team must destroy the enemy's headquarters while protecting your own.

LAST YEAR'S FASHIONS

Although the very simply textured polygons in DI's earlier HIND made for speedy frame rates on all but the slowest systems, some gamers aren't willing to sacrifice flash and dazzle for gameplay. In order to make the game more appealing to these players, DI updated the graphics engine to display much more detailed texture maps.

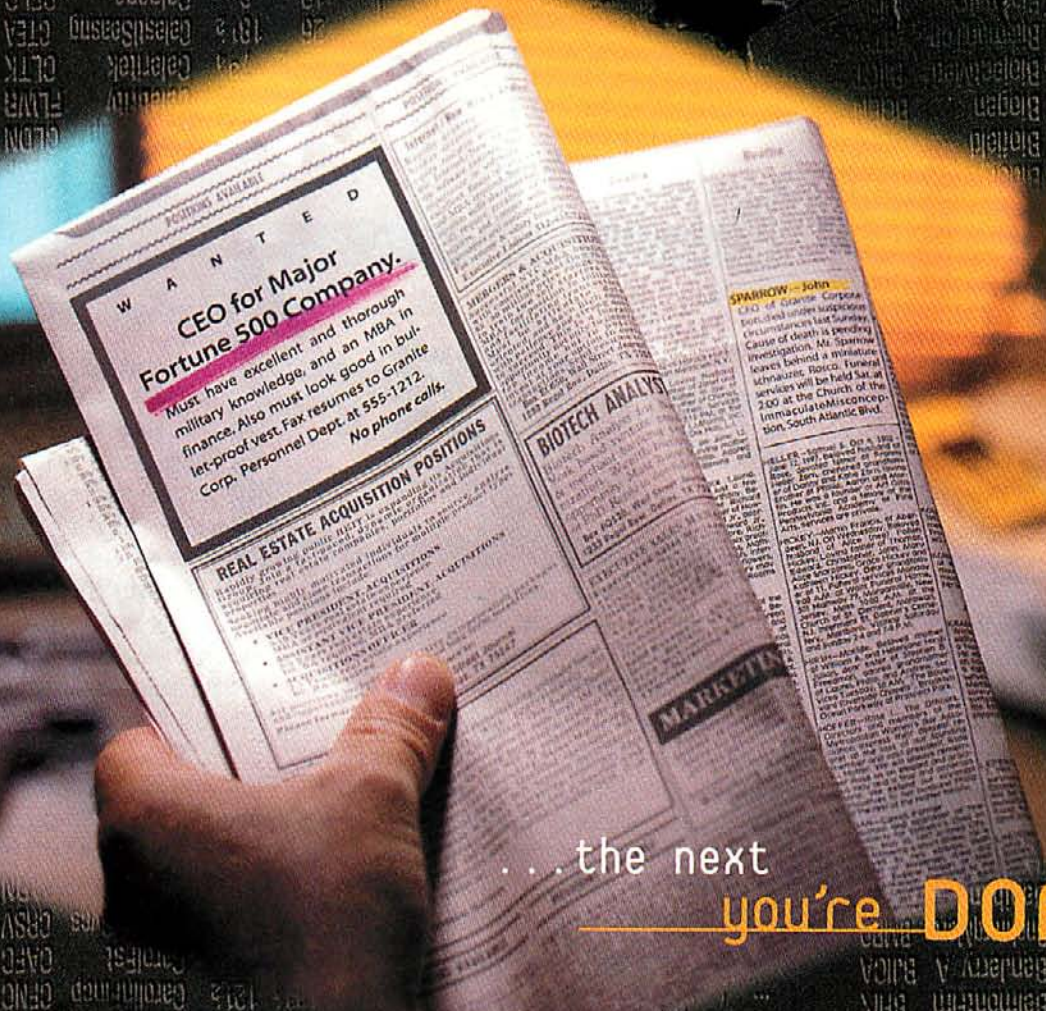
Unfortunately, while these improved graphics would have been impressive had the game shipped in 1996 as planned, they're only likely to seem average to the eye-candy crowd that's been spoiled by the likes of F-22 LIGHTNING II or even Interactive Magic's own iF-22. Frame rates in the beta were sluggish at the higher details on a P166, with the DOS version outpacing the Windows 95 executable. Of course, graphics speed is likely to improve as the game is optimized before shipping. If the sim does seem too slow on your system, you can decrease the texture detail and viewable distance to speed things up.

While iF-16 isn't a standard setter, it does look like it's going to be an entertaining and convincing simulation. More in the vein of APACHE and HIND than DI's earlier TORNADO, the sim should appeal to fans of those helicopter sims looking for faster action. It should also be a tasty morsel for sim fans starving for F-16 action, who've been waiting for years for the waiter to deliver FALCON 4.0 to their tables.

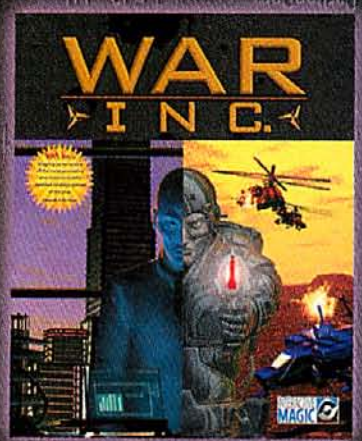


DETAILS, DETAILS You can vary iF-16's texture detail and visual viewing range to get the best possible frame rate on your system.

{ that's the way it is in ~~business~~, one day you're ceo }



. . . the next ~~you're~~ DOA.

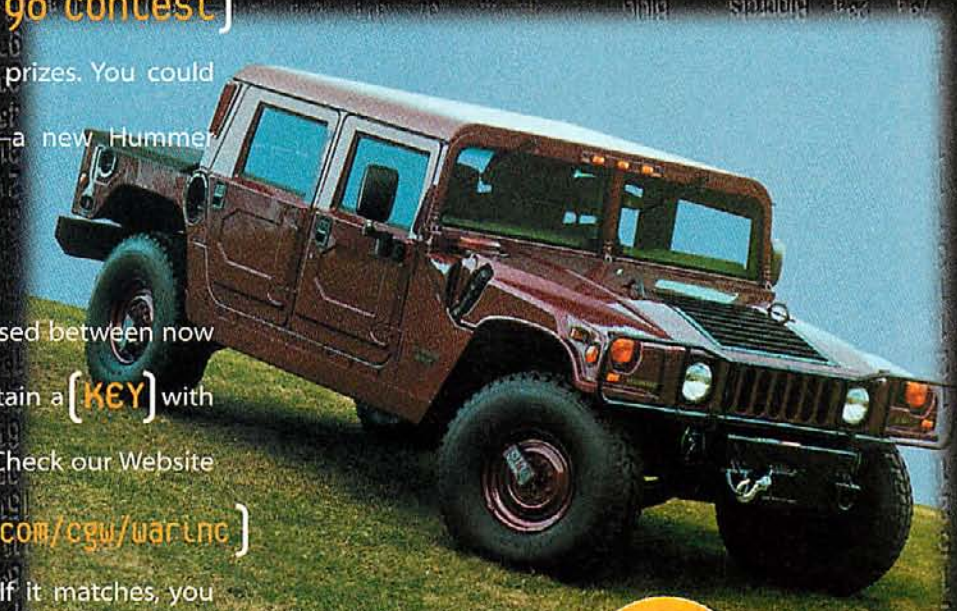




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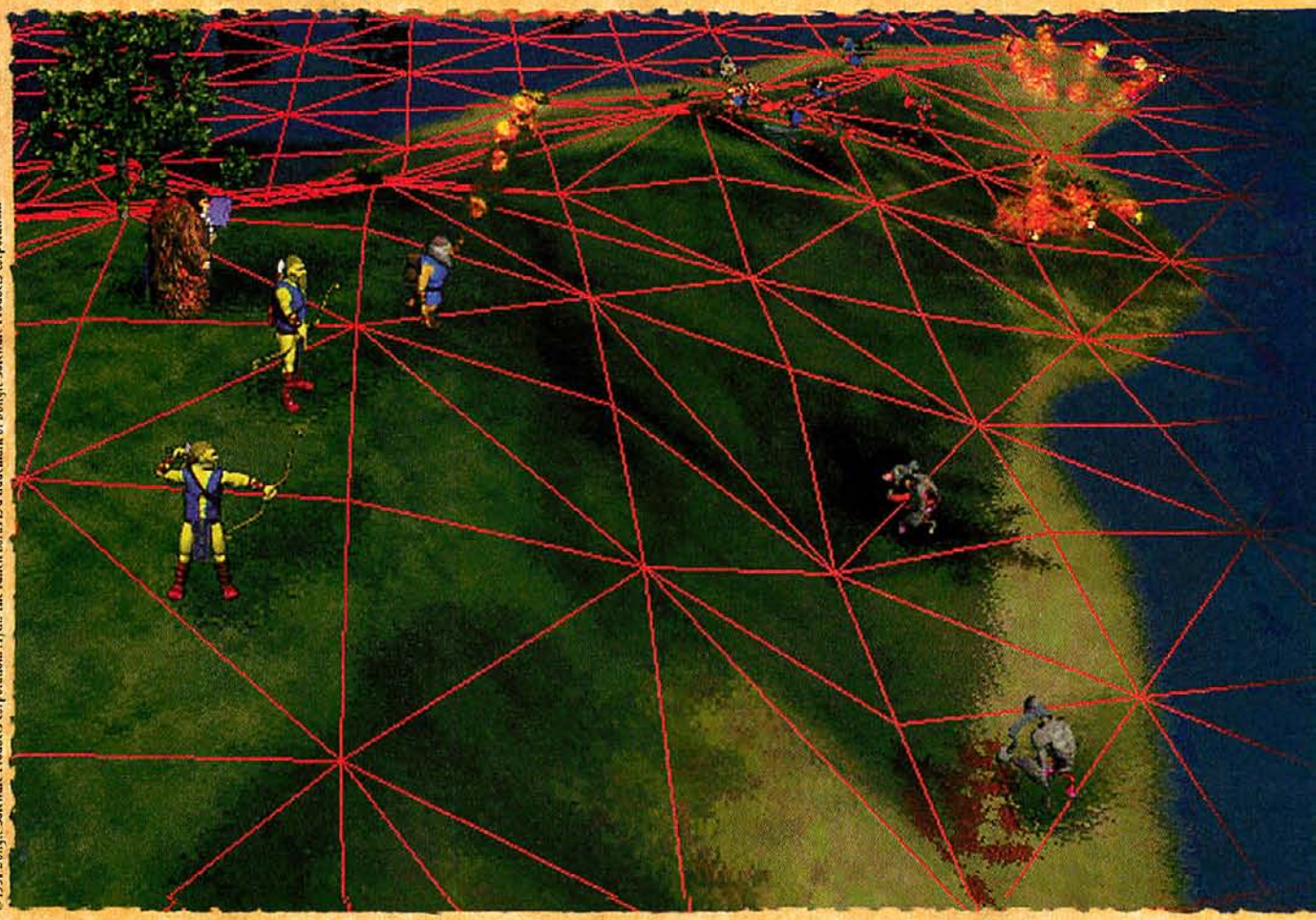
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myth
THE FALLEN LORDS

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #264

Target Release Date: September 1997
Developer: Eidos
Publisher: Eidos

Hack and Slash

Lara Lends Her Look to Eidos' Upcoming Fantasy Dungeon Romp

by Elliott Chin

Until Lara Croft came along and gave us a peek at her adventurous lifestyle in TOMB RAIDER, Eidos was a relative unknown, a merger of two companies—Domark and US Gold—that weren't always synonymous with quality software. But the third-person action-adventure in TOMB RAIDER changed all that. Instantly, Eidos had a global spokeswoman and a hit game. TOMB RAIDER made people wake up to the potential at Eidos, and it also rekindled developers' trust in third-person 3D (to be fair, the other great third-person game that sparked this renaissance was Miyamoto's MARIO 64).

At this year's E3, I saw more than a dozen third-person games. Some were serious action affairs, such as TOMB RAIDER 2; others were cutesy animal adventures like CROC; while still others took the TOMB RAIDER look and gave it a fantasy twist. One of these was none other than Eidos' very own DEATHTRAP DUNGEON, a game that was in development when parts of Eidos were still known as Domark. DEATHTRAP DUNGEON shares much with TOMB RAIDER, and the resemblance is definitely more than skin deep.



REX IN EFFECT The boss creatures in DEATHTRAP are great. In addition to dragons and Hydras, you'll face a T. rex so huge that its head dwarfs your character.



FLASH ATTACK Is the amazon's outfit not ridiculous? Is the enemy admiring her attack or her armor?

DUNGEON HACK

DEATHTRAP DUNGEON is a third-person action game that plays through 10 levels of mazes, dungeons, and monster-filled corridors. Whereas TOMB RAIDER had a healthy dose of adventure elements to keep you thinking, DEATHTRAP is really a hack-and-slash ride.

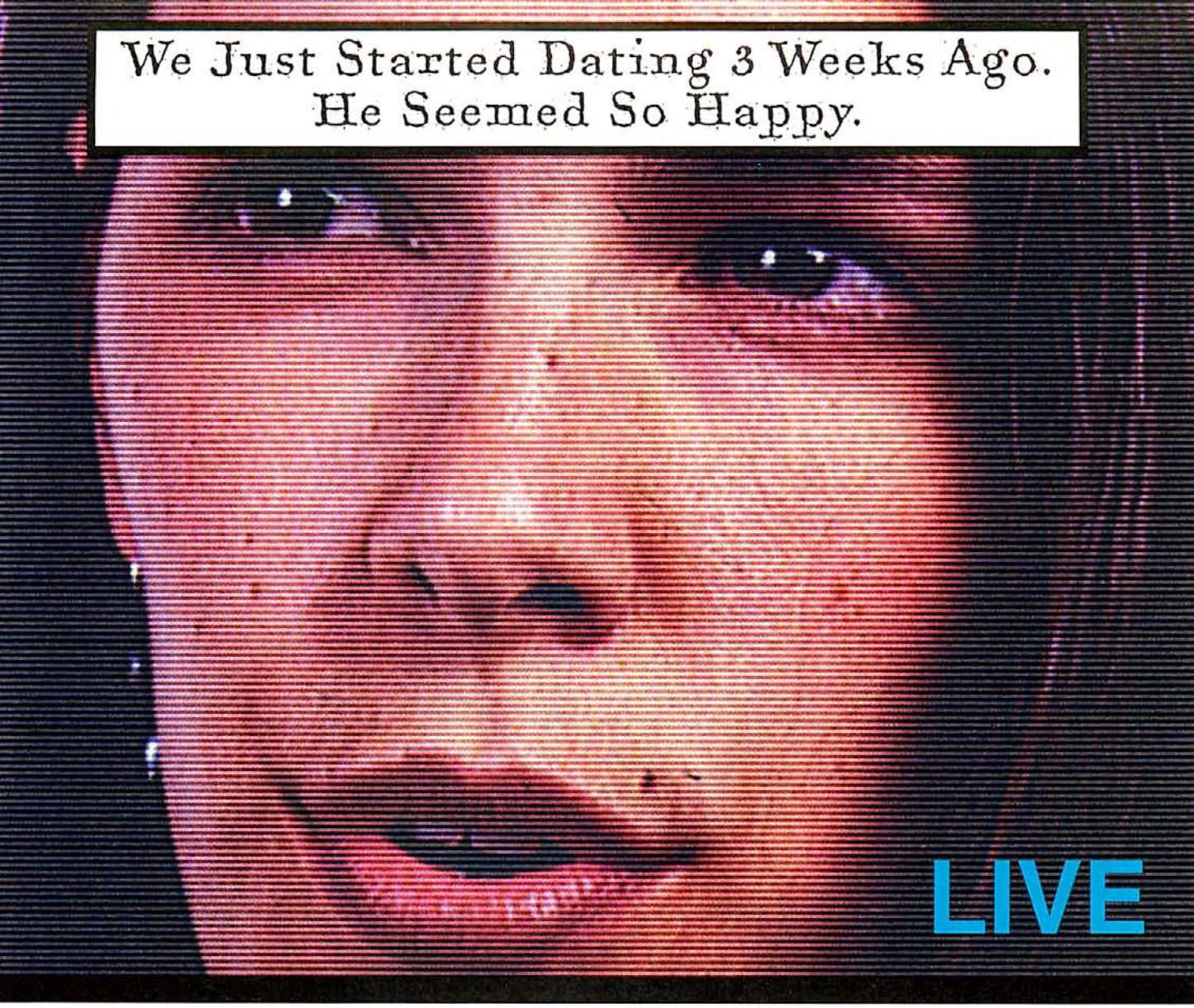
The game is played from third-person view, though there is a first-person camera that lets you see things from your character's standpoint. I found that the first-person view wasn't very well implemented, even though many times I wanted to be able to use it to get a better look at my surroundings.

You can play as one of two characters: a fully armored, muscled warrior or a scantily clad amazon. Now, I have to take a time out to say how disappointed I am in the depiction of the female character. Her "armor" makes Lara's outfit seem prudish: All she has is a chain attached to her nipples and a scaled thong. I'm no expert, but I doubt that any sane warrior would march into battle wearing nothing but metal butt floss. I'm tired of seeing female heroes who look more like sluts than warriors. Come on, Eidos, give the amazon some real armor.

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Fighting Fantasy

FIGHTING FANTASY is a series of choose-your-own-adventure fantasy books written by Eidos' Chairman Ian Livingston, who is the founder of Games Workshop (of *Warhammer* fame).

The books are pseudo role-playing games you play alone. At critical junctures in the story, such as when you face a monster, you'll be given two choices. If you choose to run, you turn to one page and read how the story progresses. If you stay and fight, you skip to another page to witness the consequences of your decision.

The jump from paperback to computer is something Livingston has been planning for the series for some time. Livingston wrote the *Fighting Fantasy* series long before he joined Eidos, and DEATHTRAP DUNGEON is his extension of the series into the silicon arena.

packed dungeons, you get a treasure trove of nasty weapons at your disposal. There are close combat weapons, ranged weapons, and spells. You have short swords, long swords, axes, halberds, and war hammers for bashing and slashing enemies up close and personal. If you want to play it safe and dispatch monsters from a distance, you can pull out a blunderbuss, a primitive gun, or even a medieval rocket launcher—basically a giant firecracker on a sling. Each spell has a different cosmetic look, but all basically produce the same result: the annihilation of the enemy in a shower of magical energy.

VISCERAL REWARDS

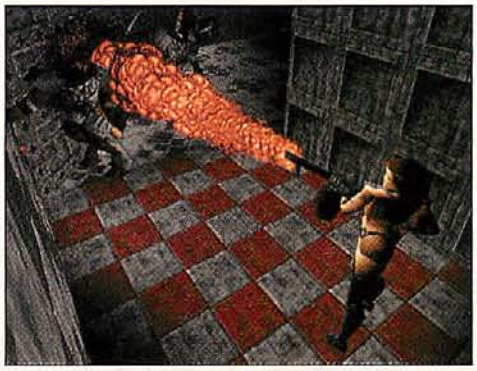
As you might expect in a hack-and-slash game of this type, you are rewarded for every kill. Heads will fly off shoulders at the strike of a sword, and legs will come cleanly off the joint when met by a jagged ax. Surprisingly, though, there is little blood. Perhaps it was because my beta version played only in low res, but the infrequent blood that would spurt from wounded enemies was simply a small clump of red pixels.



FLYING PURPLE PEOPLE-EATER Here is the monstrous purple dragon. He isn't too smart now, but he'll be a tough boss to beat in the final version.



COME GET SOME DEATHTRAP offers a third-person 3D look like TOMB RAIDER, but also has dynamic lighting and Direct3D support.



ORC-KEBOB Weapons abound in DEATHTRAP, including melee weapons and fantastic ranged weapons, such as this medieval flamethrower.

In the version I played, the AI didn't seem to be implemented, so clowns would just rush up to me, even after I had killed waves of their comrades. The Hydra and the purple dragon (the latter is the final boss in the game) didn't even put up much of an intelligent fight, sometimes spewing fire to either side of me but never directly *at* me. As I said, though, I played a beta, and I'm sure the monsters will be a little more intelligent in the final version.

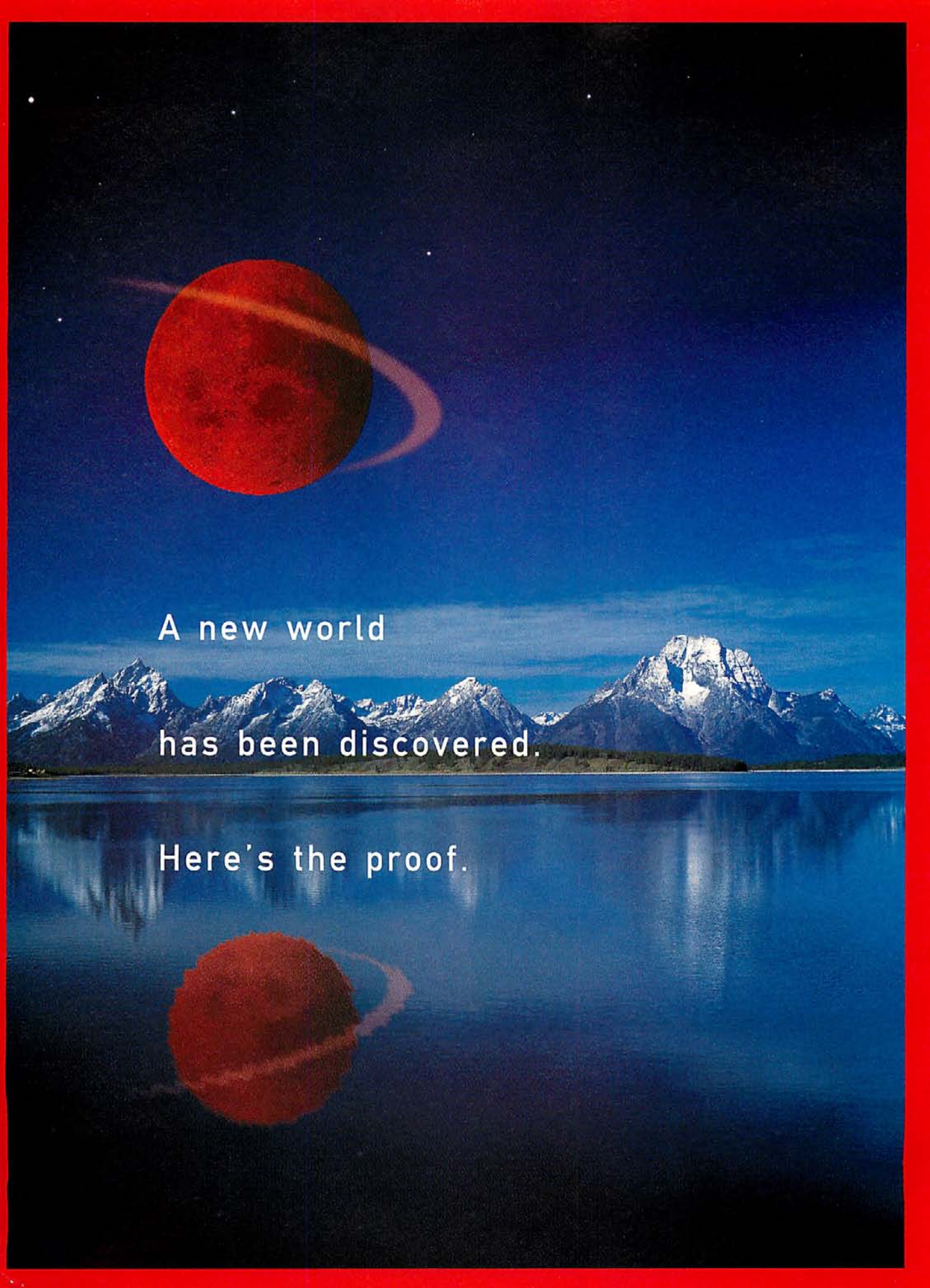
Speaking of monsters, there are lots of them, both in terms of type and number. You'll fight a gamut of fantasy mainstays: nagas, orcs, mummies, and zombies, just to name a few. The level bosses are quite impressive. The three-headed Hydra, a creature that fills the screen, attacks by rearing back its heads and spitting torrents of flame. The purple dragon is likewise awe-inspiring, gnashing at you with its toothy maw and spewing fireballs in your direction.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This rough version of DEATHTRAP DUNGEON lacks the polish and style of TOMB RAIDER, but DEATHTRAP will have multiplayer and Direct3D support—two things TOMB RAIDER sorely needed. I wasn't able to test the multiplayer feature, but it should be good for modem and network play. If the camera-angle problem can be fixed, deathmatches could be fun.

The version I played was a good game. I have a soft spot for fantasy games, so hacking away at orcs and dragons proved an ideal way to spend my gaming hours. However, the levels in this current version seem to be sparsely populated; they start with minimal action. I hope there will be more action in the final version. Also, the camera angle kept thwarting me. I had no control over my third-person camera; sometimes I would direct my character around a corner without being able to see what was there. The third time an ax came flying out of the corner before I could see it, I gave up. After I cooled down, I went back in, but the poor camera angles still made for moments of frustration. If Eidos can create an option for controlling the camera in third-person (as does MARIO 64), then this game will move up several notches on my playlist.

TOMB RAIDER proved that Eidos can create a killer game. Now, they hope to repeat the success with DEATHTRAP DUNGEON, a game with a similar look and gameplay, but with a fantasy theme. Can they succeed? If they fix some minor problems and the game gets the same polish as Lara Croft's maiden voyage, there is a good chance that Eidos could add another jewel to their crown.


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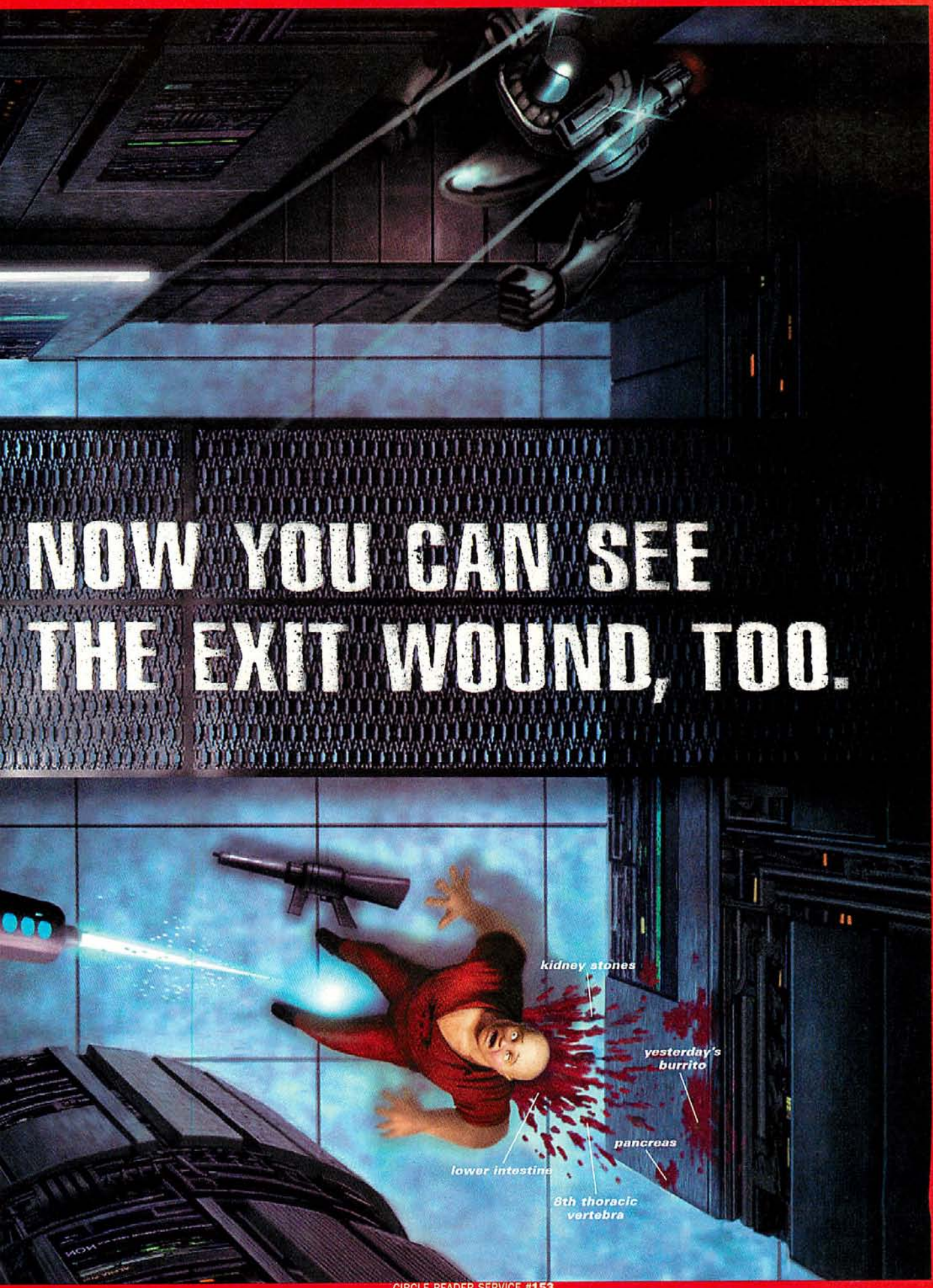
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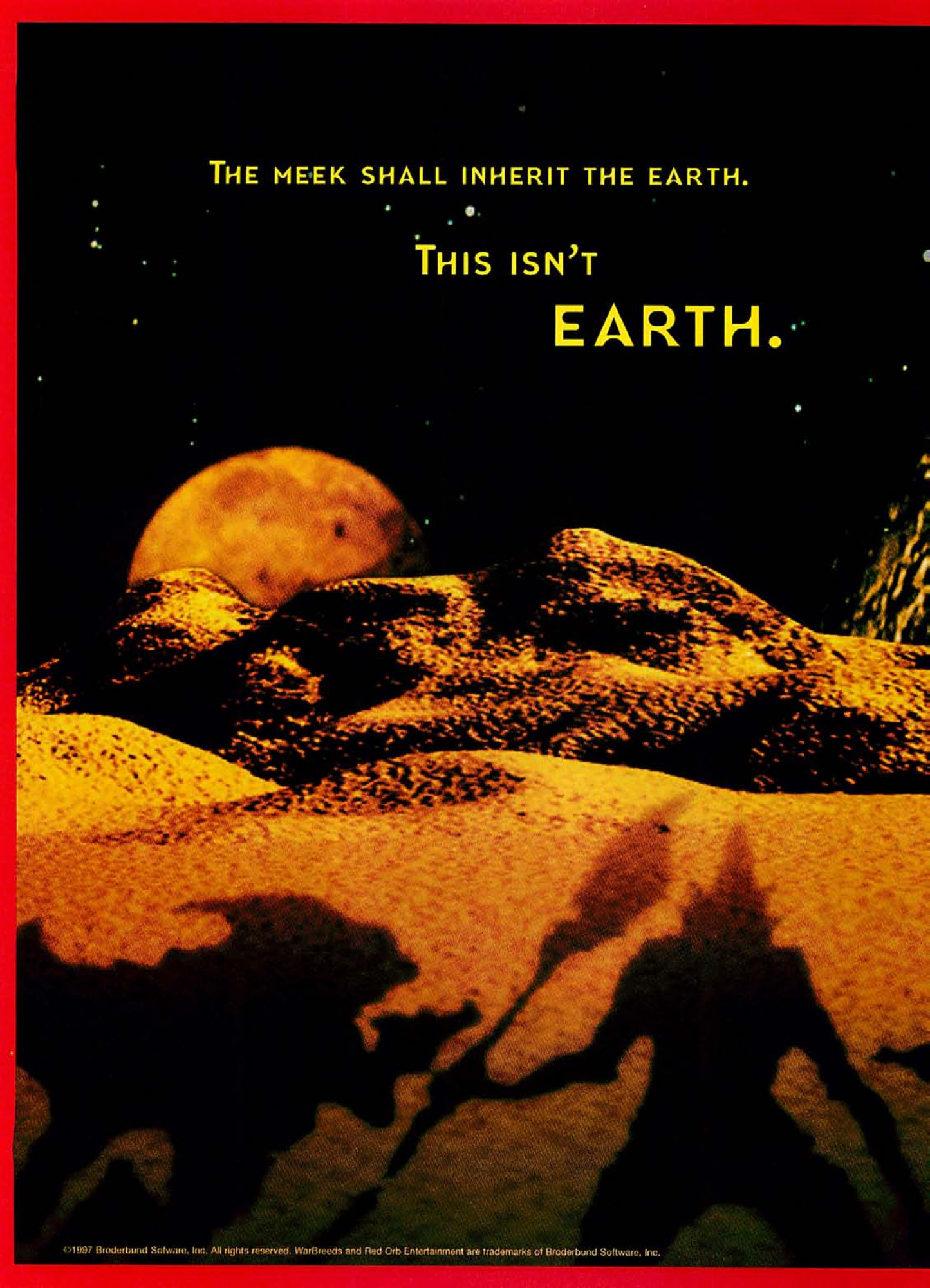
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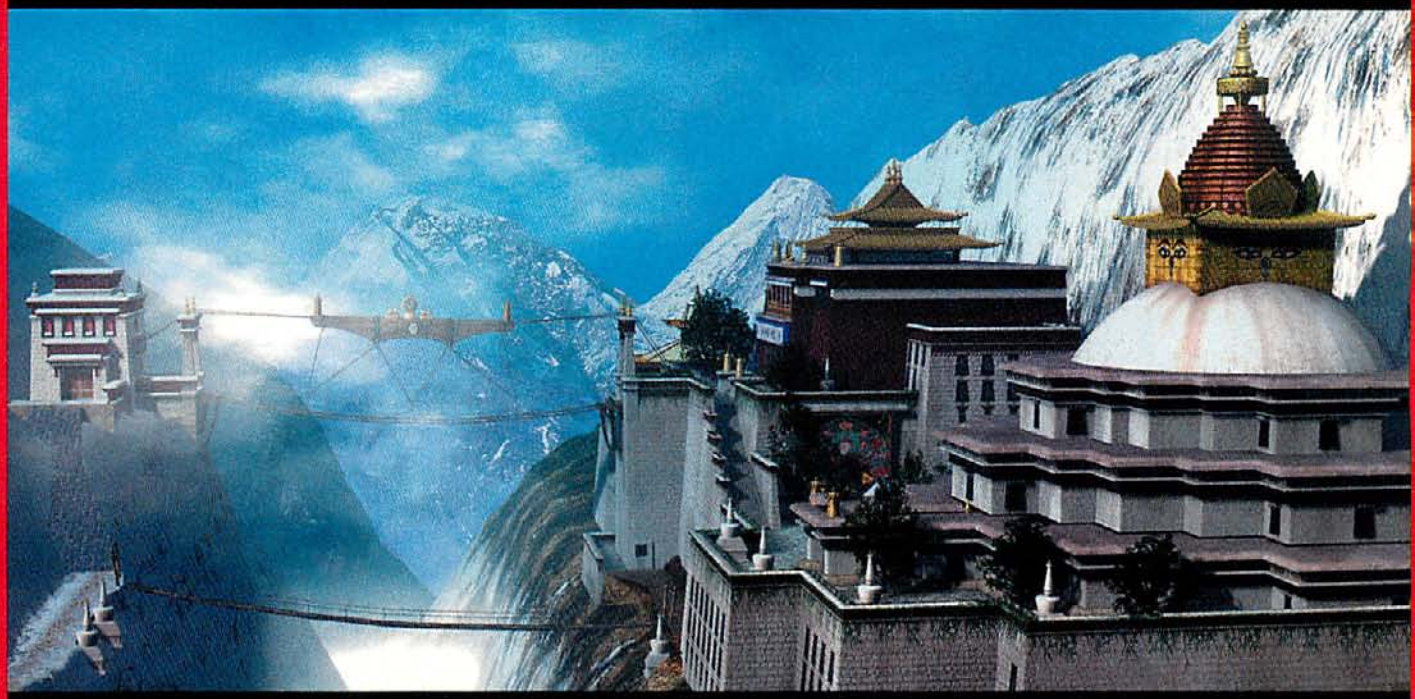
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FOR YOUR EYES ONLY



CGW Gives You All the Top-Secret Info on the

Removing my trenchcoat, I sat down at the PC and clicked on the .WAV file icon.

"Good morning, Mr. Atkin. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to infiltrate the Electronic Entertainment Expo, also known as E3. Go behind the scenes, enter the back rooms, and tag along closely behind key developers as parties wear on and lips begin to loosen. You must bring back the scoop on what's in store for gamers this fall and beyond. As always, should you or any of your *CGW* force be captured or killed, your superiors will disavow any knowledge of your existence. Good luck, Denny. This hard drive will format in five seconds."

Johnny's assignments were always a mixed bag. Certainly, we had an exciting mission ahead of us but, as my drive started grinding away, I steeled myself to install Windows 95 yet again.

I gathered the team and made plans to go to Atlanta. If anyone could pull it off, it was this group. Agent Chin, action and strategy expert, had the youthful energy to check out the more than 50 real-time strategy games on display in only three days. Agent Green, master of vocal disguise, could slip into adventure/RPG and sports presentations unnoticed. Agent Salvator, the hardware expert and undercover mole, would dig into cases and see what gamers would expect in next year's game rigs. Agent Panther, our operative from MI5, could ferret out even the most puzzling games. Our multimedia expert, Operative Anderson, would seek the demos



New Games for Fall—Nobody Does It Better

that would show the real truth. General Coleman would gather military intelligence. I'd provide air coverage, and the infamous Mr. Wilson would be out front, using his fame and wit to distract the crowds while the rest of the team worked its magic.

Upon our arrival at the show, we found that our mission was going to be so easy that it would be difficult. That is, the number of enticing games on which to gather information seemed to be at an all-time high. Although there were few standouts, for once there were also very few obvious dogs. Instead, dozens of quality games were in the works. It was going to be an interesting show, and an interesting year ahead for *CGW* readers.

The trends were easy to pick out. A large percentage of games were being shown on 3D cards, especially 3Dfx cards. Games with multiplayer support were abundant, some of which even had a good balance of single- and multiplayer features. First-person action, real-time strategy, and simulations were the genres of choice, far outnumbering the rest. And people were still trying to determine the formula for making money from Internet gamers.

The usual company shifts had occurred as well. Activision, a company seemingly fading away only two E3s ago, had a huge booth that was packed with attendees and a life-size giant robot. Eidos Interactive, a bit player in its days as Domark, stole the show with its Lara Croft look-alikes, 3D sims, and action games. And MicroProse, a company that's had a rough few years, hit the show with its strongest lineup since its heyday in the late 1980s.

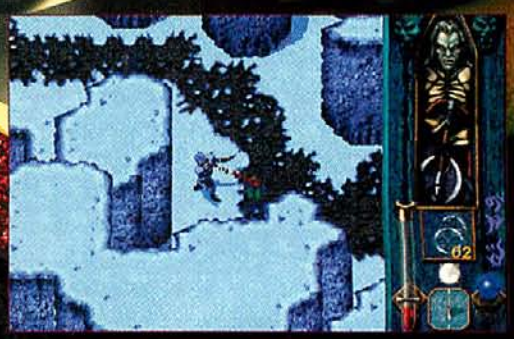
In all, it was a successful information grab. The folders that follow provide the vitals on more than 100 of the hottest titles shipping in coming months. The only possible gaps in our data are the ETAs. Previous missions have shown that even our most informed sources are sometimes too optimistic, and a game planned to ship in November is just as likely to be available just in time for spring break.

The intelligence that follows is broken down by genre. This magazine will biodegrade in 73 years. —*Denny Atkin*

Reuer



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #145

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

E3 REPORT

QUAKE II

Target Release Date: November 1997
Developer: id Software
Publisher: id Software

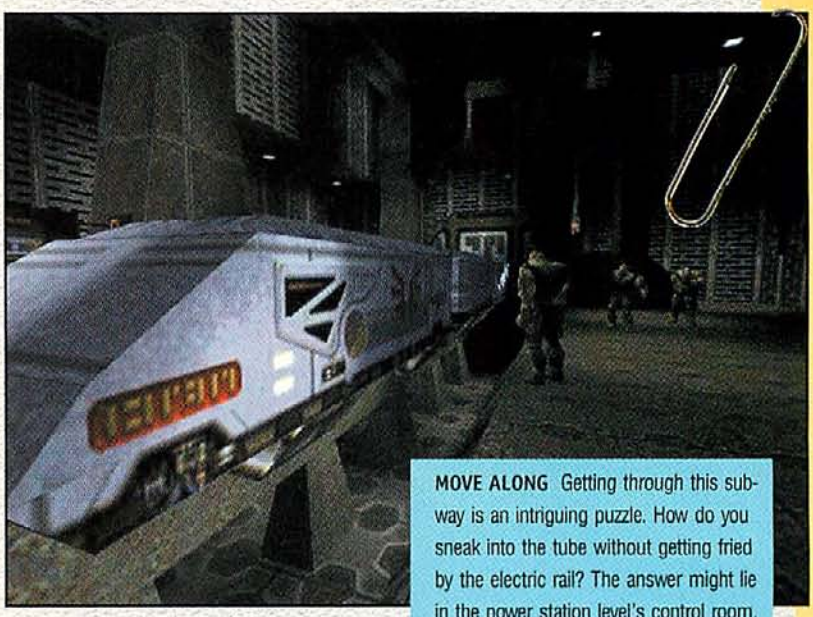
The Big One

Id Strikes Back With What Could Be Its Best Game Yet

by Elliott Chin and V. Long

This year, we scoured the E3 show floors with a mission: to strip away the chaff and find the best upcoming games to feed your gaming hunger for fall. What we found was a bevy of fantastic-looking games spread throughout the genres, but the game we kept coming back to—the PC game with the biggest crowds at the show—was id's QUAKE II. Without a doubt, it was the Game of the Show.

From all indications, both from the E3 demo we played and from talks with the id designers, QUAKE II will push the envelope of immersion light years beyond QUAKE, exceeding all our expectations. True, the single-player expectations might have been low to begin with, but we're confident that id's latest masterpiece will be so good that it will restore the company's prominence in both technology *and* gameplay.



MOVE ALONG Getting through this subway is an intriguing puzzle. How do you sneak into the tube without getting fried by the electric rail? The answer might lie in the power station level's control room.

ONCE MORE INTO THE BREACH...

QUAKE II, in contrast to QUAKE, has a tighter plot and story-driven missions. Kevin Cloud, QUAKE II's project leader, describes the plot as an aliens vs. humans affair: "Earth is at war with an alien race. We have been beaten down for years, and now it's time to launch a counterstrike [against the aliens' planet]. Unfortunately, the alien race has a large planetary defense system that prevents us from sending in any large attack ships. Our strategy is to send in thousands of one-man pods in the desperate hope that some will get through. As your pod crashes onto the planet your adventure begins."

QUAKE II from id... Without a doubt...the Game of the Show

The game isn't broken into episodes, but rather into three chapters that chronicle your attempt to disable the alien defense system. Chapter one involves eliminating the security grid that protects the industrial defense complex; chapter two deals with destroying the defense system; and chapter three is the final showdown with the alien bosses.

REAL WORLDS, REAL LEVELS

The levels, far from being linear marathon sessions to eradicate every enemy in sight, are designed to fit the chapters. There are approximately 28–30 levels, categorized into "units" consisting of 1–6 levels (although most units have only 3 or 4). All levels within a unit will be connected, so you can travel back and forth between the unit's levels.

What's most compelling is that you'll have to travel between levels to solve certain puzzles, such as deactivating power grids and unlocking doors. To guide you through the puzzles, there may be a portable computer that pops up to provide in-game hints. Among the different units are an abandoned base, a warehouse, a detention center, a security complex, a mine, a factory, a power station, a hanger, and a lab. These areas will be more functional than those in QUAKE, meaning that a hangar will look like a hangar, complete with aircraft in storage, and a detention center will have cells and guard stations.

Id is also going for a unified look in QUAKE II. Gone are the schizophrenic levels typical of QUAKE. We're on an alien planet now, and everything will be mechanical.

Smart Monsters Duck

Id is improving their monsters' AI to provide a greater challenge. Certain monsters, such as the Gunner, will duck when fired upon. Some will be able to use the same weapons as you, and some won't stop chasing you. The Berserker, in particular, is as fast as you, and will hunt you down throughout the level. They'll track you down by sight or sound. Even if they can't see you in the darkness, they'll find you if you make noise. That also means you can hide from a monster if you keep still. That's in contrast to QUAKE, where the monsters had an omniscient awareness of you.





technological, and futuristic. QUAKE II is every bit as dark and moody as QUAKE, but the look is much more consistent, both internally and with respect to the story.

MORE GORE

QUAKE II will have story, consistency, and well-designed missions, but what about destruction and mayhem? At E3, five weapons were working. QUAKE II has no melee weapon: A laser-spitting blaster will take the axe's place as default weapon. The blaster has unlimited ammo, but if you shoot it too quickly, it won't cause as much damage on successive shots.

The second weapon is an uzi-like machine gun. Firing it on full-auto makes the muzzle climb skyward, causing your shots to go high. Accordingly, you need to compensate by pushing your aim down.

The third weapon is the shotgun, which now looks like a futuristic bullpup streetsweeper. You see your hands pump the gun to chamber the next shell and, yes, the magazine drum actually spins as the shell gets chambered.

The fourth weapon is a DOOM favorite: the chain gun. The longer you fire at full-auto, the faster the six barrels spin. At top speed, the barrels glow white and spew a blistering 2,400 rounds per minute. Id plans to reduce the cyclic rate in the final version, though.

The most impressive weapon included at the show was the rail gun. It fires a high-powered projectile that trails a spiral of transparent blue light behind it, which slowly fades away (like in the movie *Eraser*). The projectile is so powerful that it can punch through multiple targets, killing them all and stopping only when it hits a wall.

These weapons are only the beginning of QUAKE II's arsenal. There will be a black hole generator, called the disintegrator, that shoots out a black hole that casts dynamic darkness, which is essentially dynamic lighting in reverse. Targets hit by the disintegrator will fade in and out; successive hits will make them disappear forever. No word yet on how it will work in DeathMatch.

There will also be a grenade launcher and a rocket launcher, just as in QUAKE. Though "rocket jumping" was an accident in QUAKE, id is keeping it for QUAKE II. There are also plans to include pipe bombs or proximity mines, as in DUKE and SCOURGE OF ARMAGON. QUAKE II's BFG is still undecided.

QUAKE II will have a new inventory system to organize the collected weapons and items. You can stick with the default configuration or define your own keys for each item. Multiple copies of an item can be picked up and dropped. In DeathMatch, if you already have a rocket launcher, you can pick up a second one and give it to a teammate.

CREATURE FEATURES

We saw four monsters in the E3 version of the game, all half-organic and half-machine. There was the standard Infantry grunt who employed a blaster, and a sleeker and taller cyborg called the Gunner. When he fired, his right forearm split into three plates that pulled back to expose a blazing three-barrel chain gun. The most intimidating monster was the ogre-sized robotic Tank. It had four attacks: a laser gun and machine gun on either hand, a rotating rocket launcher mounted on his right shoulder, and a fist attack. When it's in melee range or under duress, the Tank will hammer the ground with his fist, creating a small earthquake that will shake the floor and cause major damage. The last monster we saw was a cyborg torso mounted on a pair of mech-type legs. There are more monsters planned for QUAKE II than were in QUAKE, including a medic who can heal the other monsters.

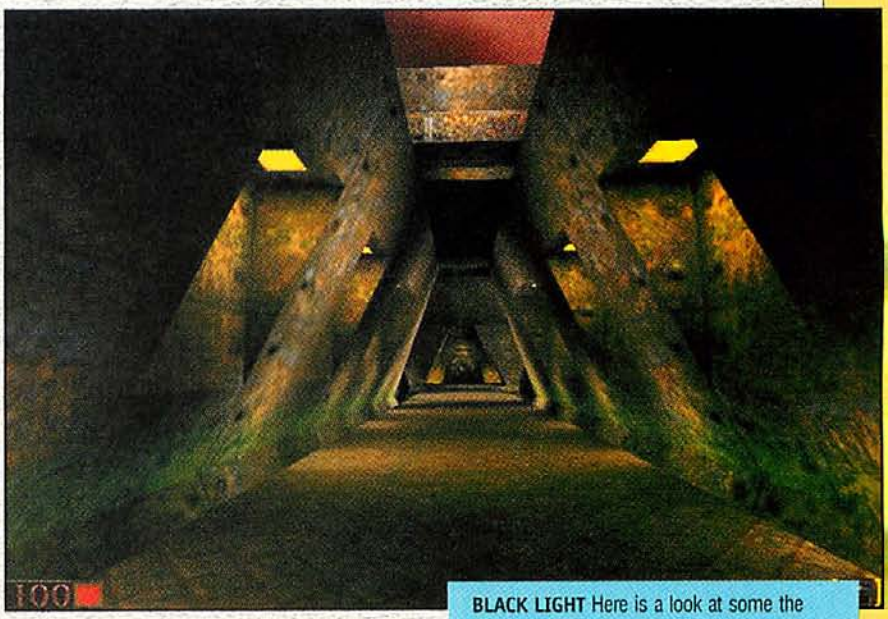
Not only are the monsters better-looking than those in QUAKE, they behave more realistically. There are realistic animations for each monster when it gets attacked. The animation is so fluid



RAIL AWAY This is the rail gun, one of QUAKE II's more impressive weapons. Notice the faint spiral of blue light.

that the monsters seem alive. It was great to see the Gunner grab his left side, drop to one knee and break his fall with his left arm when shot. When the Tank was shot, his head snapped back, and when it came back up, it was bloody and—even cooler—it was missing flesh.

Indeed, if you keep shooting at a monster, it will start to bleed, sport bullet holes, and then grimace. All the monsters show different levels of damage. This not only adds to the realism of the game, but it also gives you a visual cue for how damaged an enemy is. When a Gunner starts to grimace and bleed as bullet holes ventilate his flesh, you know he isn't long for this world.



BLACK LIGHT Here is a look at some the enhanced lighting for QUAKE II. QUAKE's dark moodiness is maintained, but the look will be more consistent.

ENGINE UPDATES

The engine is also undergoing an extreme upgrade. There are transparencies (in the water and in special effects such as the rail gun); glass and certain other items can be broken; and there will be new physics, so that when a monster is hit by a rail gun, you'll see him explode away from you in a shower of chunks, not just in an omni-directional shower as in QUAKE. You'll also be able to push monsters and objects.

Gamers and monsters are now able to duck, crouch, and crawl. The sky can now have orbiting objects (this is key in the space station levels). Surface attributes can be specified, so a particular patch of ground can be slippery or rough. There are rotating brushes for spinning hallways, rotating doors, and more flexible and realistic environments.

There is also ambient sound for each type of room, and much of the music is done by the same people who put together the *Methods of Destruction* CD (their Web site is **www.cyber-age.com/qcdmain.html**). Designer John Carmack is working to implement sound radiosity for a more realistic feel. QUAKE II may even support the new 3D sound cards.

The engine should also allow id to place demos within the game, in similar fashion to the end cut-scenes in the QUAKE mission packs. Carmack hopes to incorporate in-game "movies" at critical junctures in the story (like when your squadmates get overrun by the aliens) for a totally immersive experience.

QUAKE II also uses an updated version of the QUAKEWORLD multiplayer code, meaning there will be support for 32-player modem, LAN, and Internet DeathMatches, and a Netscape plug-in for joining QUAKE servers via Navigator. Added to all this, QUAKE II is Win 95 *only*.

Also, there is a female character in QUAKE II. We don't know the details at this point, except that id wants to depict her as a combat-ready soldier, not an obscenely proportioned bimbo.

With all these improvements, it's no longer possible to dismiss id as the has-been of action gaming. Ask most anyone who was at the show what they thought was the most impressive game, and they'll utter an emphatic "QUAKE II." With a real plot; logically grouped and story-driven levels; single-player puzzles; more realistically rendered, animated, and thinking monsters; and a 3D engine that is second to none, id's next game could very well be their best

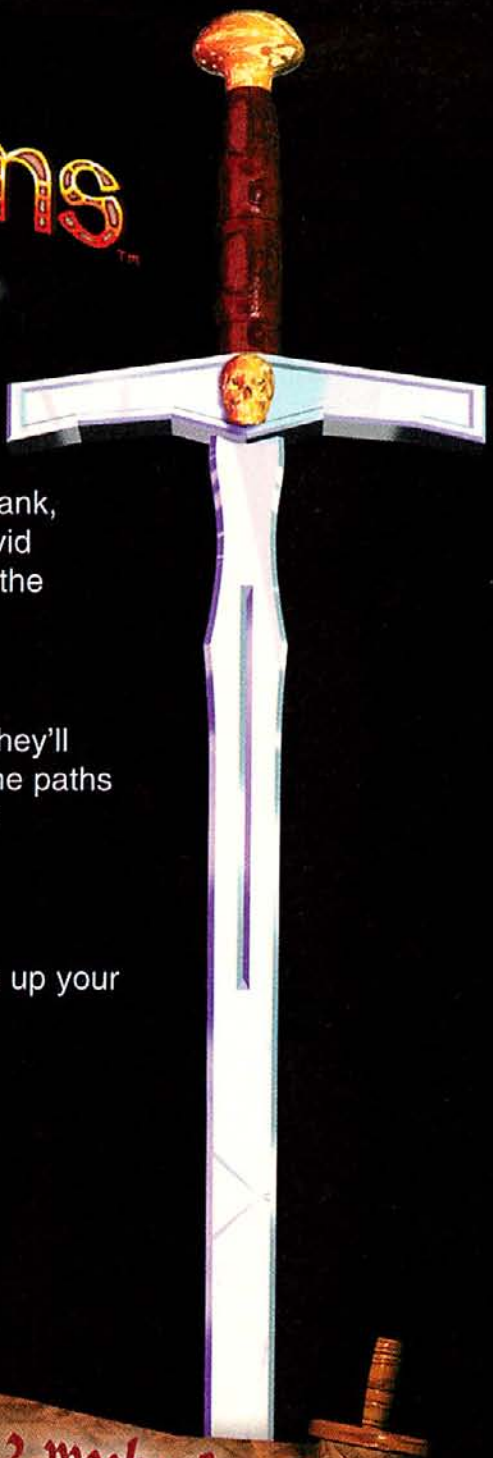


TANKS A LOT The mammoth Tank here is firing the machine gun, one of his four weapons. Id has now added hands to the weapons for a more immersive feel.

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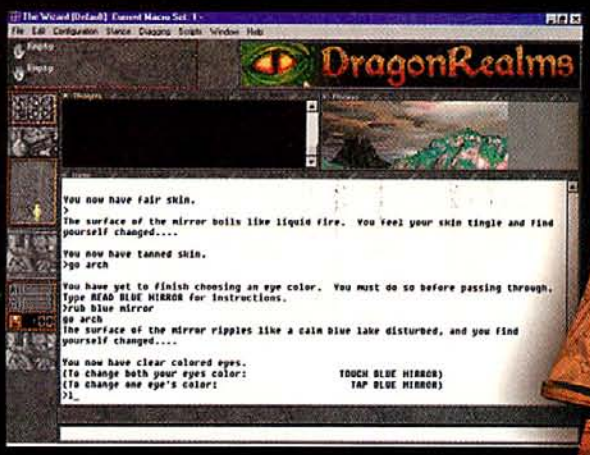
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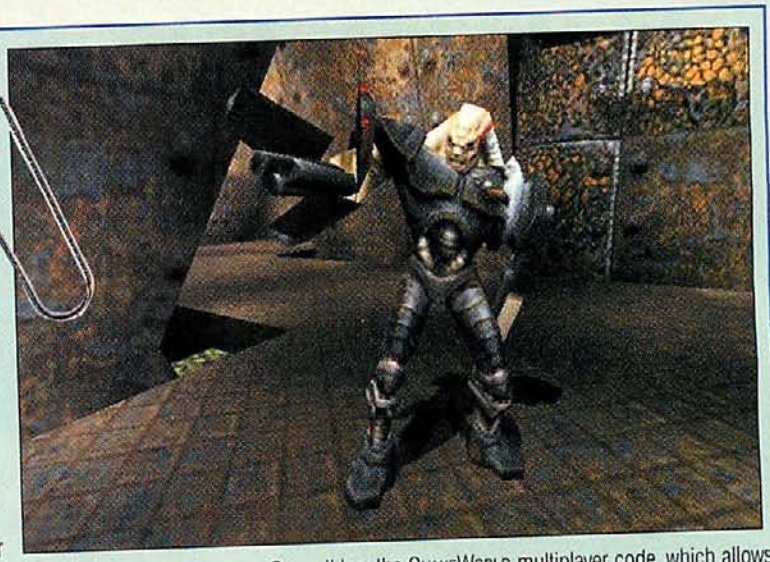
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Published by: INTERACTIVE MAGIC™

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

QUAKE II



Briefing: In our undercover hunt for the hottest games at E3, the most surprising discovery was the QUAKE II file. Id, very mindful of the criticisms leveled at QUAKE, is trying to make this version a better single-player game. Carmack and company are also attempting to make this a true sequel, unlike DOOM II, which was an expansion, at best.

Graphically, the game is a drastic enhancement over QUAKE. There are better lighting effects, more animations for the monsters, amazing special effects, and all-around improved graphics.

All the monsters in QUAKE II are new, as are the weapons and levels. Nothing remains from QUAKE. The game is also more mission-based. Rather than having linear levels, as in QUAKE, where the object was to simply run full-tilt through a level and blast everything in sight, QUAKE II's levels are more flexible. You can go back and forth between levels, so you can leave a level—even if you haven't finished it—and go back later if you want to clear it out or look for an item.

QUAKE II has the QUAKEWORLD multiplayer code, which allows for 32 player DeathMatches and modem, serial, LAN, and Internet play. It also has built-in support for joining QUAKE servers via your Web browser.

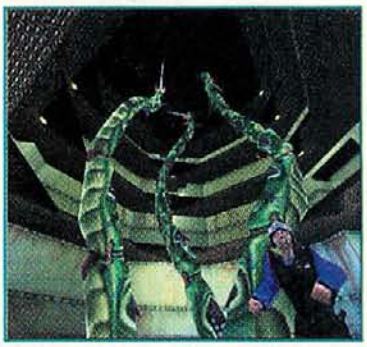
For more on QUAKE II's amazing new graphics, effects, and all-new monsters, levels, and weapons, check out our Game of the Show preview for an in-depth first look from E3.

Contact: id Software/Activision, (310) 255-2000, **www.activision.com**
ETA: October '97

HALF-LIFE

Briefing: HALF-LIFE was a surprising gem at this year's E3. It is the debut game from Valve, a startup company whose members have worked on DUKE NUKEM 3D and QUAKE mods. HALF-LIFE uses the enhanced QUAKE engine, which, combined with Valve's own enhancements, gives it a beautiful look, on a par with SIN.

The game boasts real-world environments and an exceptional AI. In one of the game's rooms in the E3 demo, we saw a scientist and security guard having an argument. During the game, eavesdropping on such conversations provides you with valuable information. More characters populate the world in order to simulate a more realistic environment. Except for a few restricted areas, HALF-LIFE's game world is also free-roaming, rather than broken into linear levels.



HALF-LIFE's AI is impressive. In one demo, we saw a four-man commando squad employ surround tactics to trap our player. When one commando was hit, he cried for a medic and ducked behind some crates for cover. Watch for a full preview in an upcoming issue of *Computer Gaming World*.

Contact: Sierra Online, (800) 757-7707, **www.sierra.com**
ETA: November '97

HEXEN II

Briefing: HEXEN II is an amazing game, with beautiful graphics and environments that appear as real-life as you can get. In this continuation of the HEXEN saga, you can play as Necromancer, Assassin, Crusader, or Paladin as you try to conquer or destroy the evil serpent rider Eidolos.



You'll travel to four different worlds, with levels arranged in hubs, as in previous HEXEN games. The game features such graphic improvements as transparent monsters, stained glass windows, and a host of other enhancements that all the QUAKE-based games share, such as rotating brushes. Breakable objects are also abundant in HEXEN II; everything from windows to barrels to carts to grazing sheep can be targeted and destroyed. In some cases, clues and objects might be hidden behind bookcases or in vases. With its amazing graphics, incredibly gory weapons, highly interactive environments, and requisite QUAKE multiplayer support, HEXEN II looks ready to possess the rabid spirits of action gamers this fall. For a more in-depth preview, check out our June 1997 QUAKE Killers issue.

Contact: Activision, (310) 255-2000, **www.activision.com**
ETA: September '97

SIN



Briefing: Ritual Entertainment, formerly known as Hipnotic, exploded onto the gaming scene several months ago with the release of the QUAKE MISSION PACK NO. 1: SCOURGE OF ARMAGON. It added obvious improvements to the QUAKE theme, such as more traps and better level design, and subtle enhancements such as dynamic bullet holes in walls, great new weapons, and better AI. Now, Ritual is licensing the enhanced QUAKE engine to create its own game: SIN. Ritual is making its own enhancements to the QUAKE engine, including 16-bit lighting, that make SIN look every bit as good as QUAKE II. Also, SIN is designed along mission, rather than level, lines. That means you are given goals that require you to traverse *several* levels before completion. The story behind SIN has you tangling with an evil corporate tycoon named Alexis Sinclair. You also have a hacker sidekick who tags along and provides you with clues on your missions. If ARMAGON is any indication, SIN could be a must-have action hit. Stay tuned for a full preview in an upcoming issue of *CGW*.

Contact: Activision, (310) 255-2000, **www.activision.com**

ETA: Q1 '98

UNREAL

Briefing: Our agents report that UNREAL is indeed close to completion. The engine is running smoothly, with great animation for the monsters, impressive lighting effects, and transparencies in stained-glass windows and murky water. The game looks good, but is as dark and moody as QUAKE was. As either a female or male character, you start out imprisoned on a slave ship. After escaping, you travel to levels that range from the innards of derelict space ships to alien cloud cities to mine shafts.

Epic plans to implement multiple puzzles and a variety of cool weapons. The best weapon in UNREAL's E3-arsenal is a two-pronged weapon that fires a spinning blade that can be guided with a flick of the mouse.



UNREAL's game editor is perhaps the game's coolest feature. The editor will ship with the game, and is an object-oriented editor that gives you the ability to create the same caliber of levels as the UNREAL designers. Unfortunately, only the shareware editor will be released with the game. The full UNREAL editor will retail separately.

Contact: GT Interactive, (212) 726-6500, **www.gtinteractive.com**

ETA: Fall '97

JEDI KNIGHT



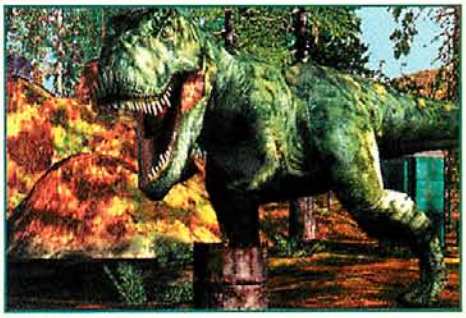
Briefing: This game was one of the highlights of last year's show, with 3D support and graphics that surpassed the unaccelerated QUAKE. Unfortunately, this year, JEDI KNIGHT sports that same engine, which means its graphics have now been surpassed by 3D-accelerated UNREAL, QUAKE II, and the other QUAKE-based games. However, between this year and last, LucasArts *has* been improving gameplay and finalizing the code, as well as implementing Internet play. As a Jedi in training, you play through levels as they are unveiled through cut-scenes. You face such familiar enemies as Storm Troopers and Gamorran pig guards, and you can employ various *Star Wars* weapons, including the ultimate weapon: the lightsaber. Plus, up to 12 Force powers are available, which range from invisibility to superspeed to Darth Vader's infamous choke. JEDI KNIGHT comes with Internet play, in addition to the standard multiplayer options. The game can be played in either first- or third-person view, and in third-person the breadth of animation is extensive, with animation for everything—including looking up, side-strafing, and sideways swimming.

Contact: LucasArts, (800) 985-8227, **www.lucasarts.com**

ETA: September '97

TRESPASSER

Briefing: Dreamworks is reviving Site B as the backdrop to their JURASSIC PARK-based action/adventure title. Steven Spielberg himself heralds TRESPASSER as the digital sequel to *The Lost World*. You are stranded on Site B (the island where all Hammond's dinos are bred), and your goal is to get off the island. In the process, you'll face many dinosaurs and real-world puzzles and environments. You only have what is available on the island to fend off the saurian menaces. But everything in the environment is available, just as in real-life. You can break off a branch from a tree for a club or roll a barrel down a hill to stop a chasing raptor. Dinosaurs act (and react) with intelligence, which means you might not have to fight them if you can outwit them. TRESPASSER promises to deliver not only a visceral gaming experience, but also the most realistic environment of any game world, where thinking and observing are every bit as important as playing. For a full preview, read our March 1997 *CGW* cover story.



Contact: Dreamworks Interactive, (310) 234-7000, **www.dreamworksgames.com**

ETA: Winter '97–'98

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

DAIKATANA



Briefing: DAIKATANA's gameplay is story-driven, with puzzles and interactive environments, as well as dialogue (courtesy of your two traveling companions, Mikiko Ebihara and Superfly Johnson). You play Hiro Miyamoto, a Japanese sword-swinger who wields a mystical daikatana that has time-traveling properties and a host of combat abilities. The game is split into four episodes crossing four time periods: far future, ancient Greece, Middle Ages, and near future. Each time period has its own distinct look, monsters, weapons, and level design. There is an experience system of sorts in the game, as your abilities with the daikatana will increase the more you use the sword. You are also awarded experience points as you advance in the game, which can be distributed across various abilities, such as speed and strength. Designer John Romero hopes to make this the best single-player experience yet in an action game, but he also is determined to bring innovation to the multiplayer arena. For more on DAIKATANA, read our June 1997 QUAKE Killers issue.

Contact: Eidos, (415) 547-1200, **www.eidosinteractive.com**
ETA: November '97

TOMB RAIDER 2



Briefing: Lara Croft is back for her second adventure in TOMB RAIDER 2. This time, she is after the Dagger of Xian, a Chinese artifact that will bestow the "power of the Dragon" onto any who plunge the blade into their heart. To retrieve this artifact, Lara has to battle Tibetan monks, the Chinese emperor's guards, and the cult members of Fiama Nera, who worship the dagger.

There are more human opponents in TOMB RAIDER 2, rather than animals, as was the case in TOMB RAIDER. The new game features outdoor settings, including Tibet, the Great Wall of China, and the city of Venice. The changes to the game's look are mostly cosmetic, since the engine stays the same. Lara now sports different clothes depending on her locale: a coat in Tibet and a wetsuit in the underwater levels. She also has new weapons, new moves, and all new levels through which to traipse.

Contact: Eidos, (415) 547-1200, **www.eidosinteractive.com**
ETA: November '97

INTERSTATE '77

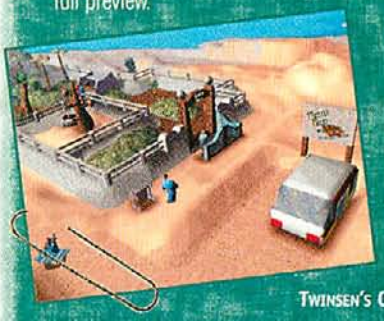


Briefing: Taurus is on the road again in Activision's upcoming INTERSTATE '77, "an epilogue" to INTERSTATE '76. The engine remains the same, but the premise and storyline are different. In the aftermath of I-'76, the U.S. economy is still in ruins, and a Vietnam vet named The General is pushing to instigate World War III by using Mexico's illegal oil smuggling as an excuse. As Taurus, you'll have to thwart The General and end the illegal oil trafficking. Improvements in the game include faster frame rate, incremental saves (to allow you to save at any time), and Direct3D support for all major 3D cards. There are also new cars and new weapons. The new multiplayer maps also include several all-racing maps for those who would rather match speed than guns. I-'77 will ship at a low price-point, like an expansion set, but won't require you to own INTERSTATE '76.

Contact: Activision, (310) 255-2000, **www.activision.com**
ETA: Fall '97

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

TWINSEN'S ODYSSEY TWINSEN's is the sequel to RELENTLESS, the 3D action/adventure from Adeline that was *CGW*'s 1994 adventure game of the year. Whether you consider TWINSEN's action or adventure (it has heavy elements of both), it is an undeniably fun game. You converse with a variety of characters and jump and fight your way through dozens of levels in this MARIO-esque platformer. See our June 1997 issue for a full preview.



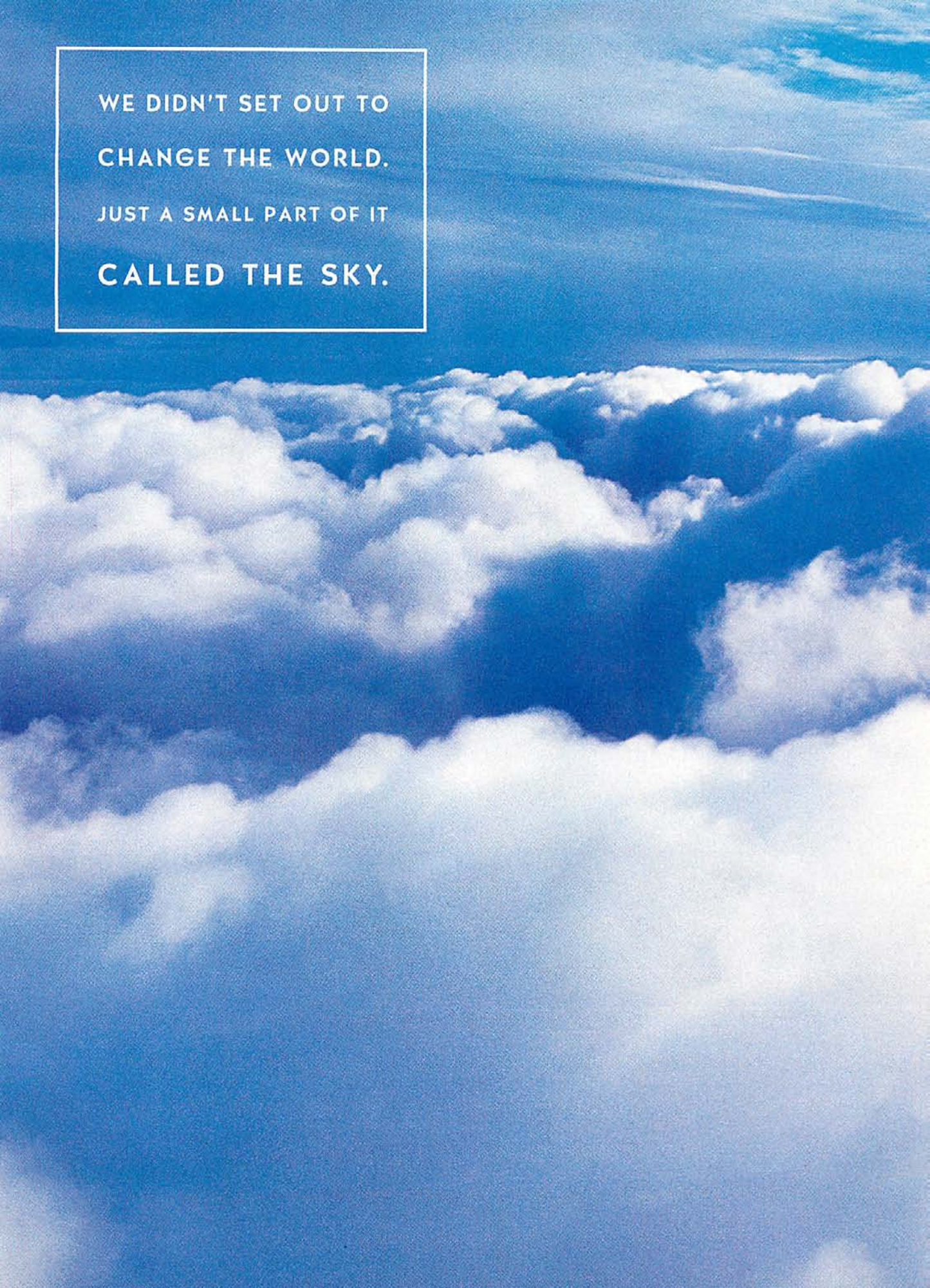
TWINSEN'S ODDYSEY

CROC Fox Entertainment's 3D platform-game CROC is nearly identical to Nintendo's masterpiece MARIO 64. As a lovable little crocodile, you waddle, jump, and tail-slap your way through 50 levels, facing puzzles, traps, and monsters in a variety of terrain. You need a 3D card to savor this game's most sumptuous graphics.

FIRST CONTACT FIRST CONTACT is a game that Trekkies and action fans will want to play. MicroProse is putting out the game, which is based on the movie and uses the UNREAL engine. As a more action-oriented game (as opposed to GENERATIONS, the adventure game), you have to retake the Enterprise E after it's been boarded by the Borg.

SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE SHADOWS, a Nintendo 64 title arriving this fall on the PC, has nearly a dozen levels of varying gameplay that run the gamut from DOOM-style shooting to rail sequences to snowspeeder shoot-'em-up action. It requires a 3D accelerator to play, but has gorgeous graphics equal to the N64 version.

ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE ABE'S ODDYSEE should turn side-scrolling on its head with a highly imaginative story, characters, and gameplay. You control Abe, who negotiates a vivid 3D environment filled with nasties using audio queues and the power of possession. The game features beautiful art and animation, and it should appeal to a variety of players.


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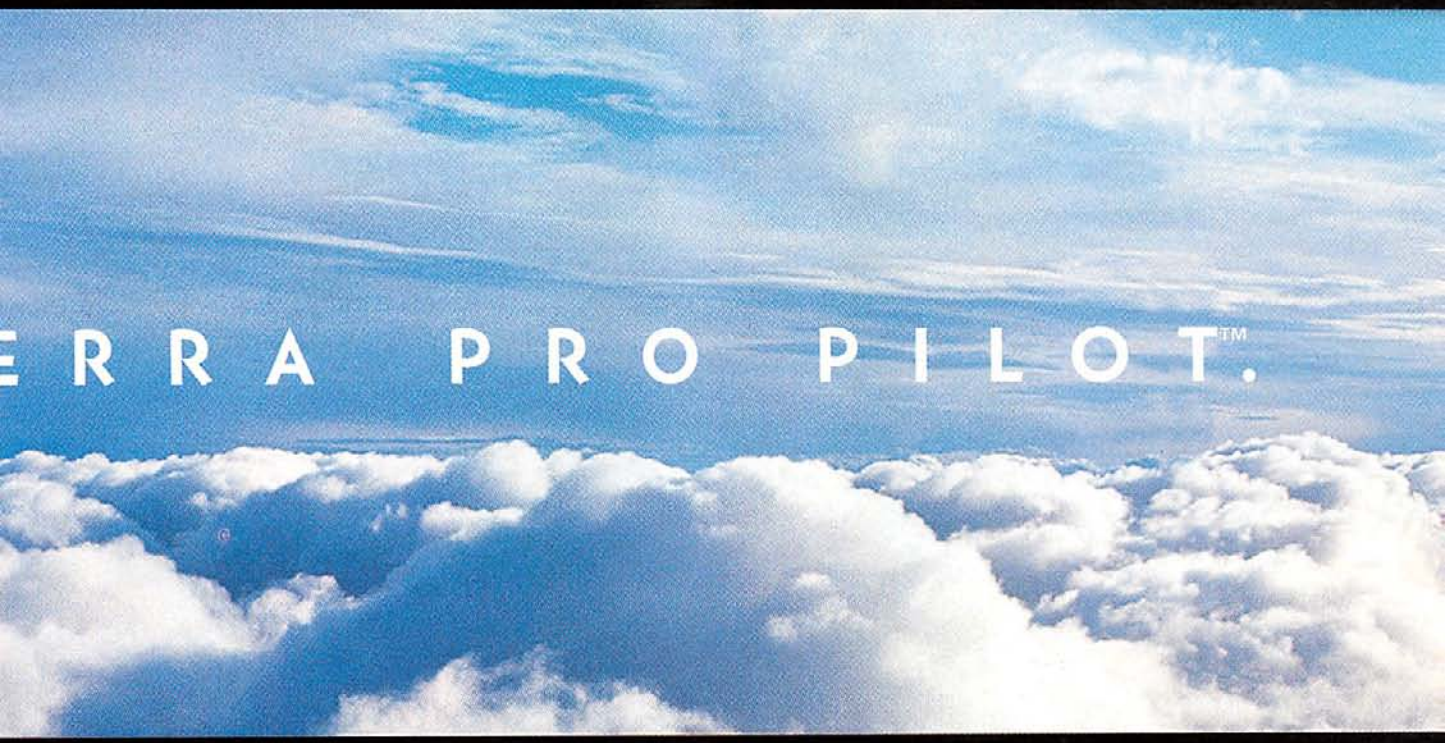
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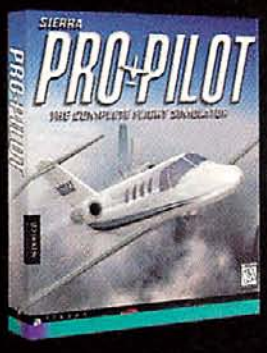
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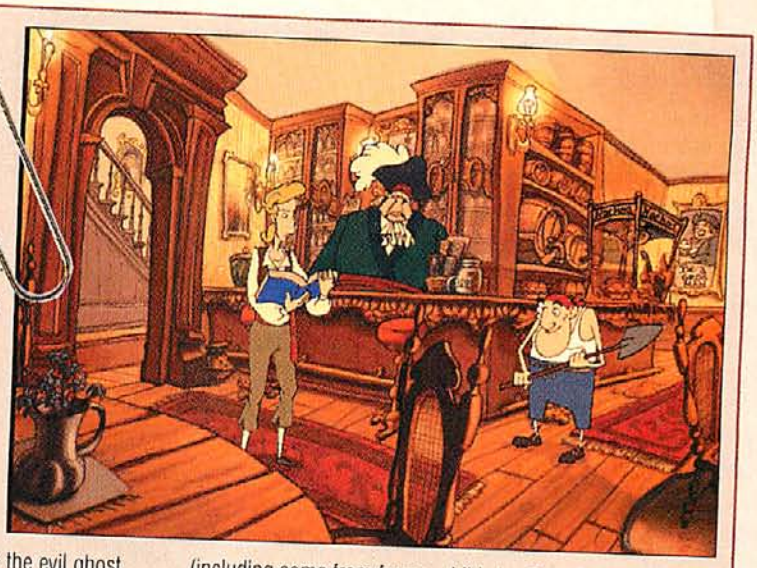
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THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND



Briefing: The pretenders come and go, but nobody makes graphic adventure games like LucasArts. Now, just in time to revive the gaming world's most troubled genre, LucasArts is back with THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND, their first adventure game since 1995's FULL THROTTLE. This, the third installment of the classic MONKEY ISLAND series (last visited in 1992), puts you once again in the role of mild-mannered pirate Guybrush Threepwood, who must remove a curse from Elaine Marley, his true love, and save her from the clutches of the evil ghost pirate LeChuck. Though Ron Gilbert, designer of the first two games, is gone, CURSE is in the able hands of longtime LucasArts developers Jonathan Ackley and Larry Ahern, who most recently worked on THE DIG and FULL THROTTLE, respectively. Based on what we've seen so far, THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND looks like it will deliver everything we've come to expect from a LucasArts adventure: outstanding animation (in glorious 2D!), clever story-based puzzles, great voice work (including some from former child-star Gary Coleman), and, of course, hilarious dialogue. While most games' branching conversation trees tend to be exercises in torture, conversation is always the highlight of LucasArts adventures, and THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND will be no exception. If you're as bummed as we are about the current state of adventure games, cheer up: This promises to be a great one.

Contact: LucasArts (800) 985-8227, **www.lucasarts.com**
ETA: Fall '97

STAR TREK: SECRET OF VULCAN FURY

Briefing: Fans of the original *Star Trek* will be thrilled to know that not only are Kirk, Spock, and the rest of the crew coming back for seven more episodes—in the form of a graphic adventure game—but the stories are actually being penned by D.C. Fontana, the writer of a number of classic *Trek* episodes. Set in the 23rd century, SECRET OF VULCAN FURY centers around a Vulcan-Romulan reunification, with each episode focusing on (and allowing you to play) a different member of the crew: Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Sulu (whom you play twice), Chekov, and Scotty. The game will be completely 3D-rendered (no video), with voice-acting from all of the original cast. This is an opportunity, in the words of one of the game's designers, for Fontana to "write the episodes she never got to write" for the TV show. For Trekkers, it sounds too good to be true. Here's hoping that Interplay can pull it off.



Contact: Interplay (714) 553-6655, **www.interplay.com**
ETA: Classified

WARCRAFT ADVENTURES: LORD OF THE CLANS

Briefing: They've conquered the strategy and RPG genres, and now the Blizzard wunderkinds are taking on adventure games in their newest title—and only a fool would bet against them. As most gamers know by now, WARCRAFT ADVENTURES: LORD OF THE CLANS continues the story of the epic clash between orcs and humans, as told in the WARCRAFT strategy games. But CLANS shifts the battle to an adventure game setting. The game picks up where WARCRAFT II: BEYOND THE DARK PORTAL left off (on the human side), with the orcs completely beaten down. You play the part of Thrall, a young orc slave who must escape his human captors, reunite the scattered orcish clans, and lead them once more to triumph. Featuring classic LucasArts-inspired 2D animation and professional voice talent, LORD OF THE CLANS promises to flesh out the world of Azeroth in a way a strategy game couldn't have done. It's a bold move by Blizzard—and we can't wait to see it.



Contact: Blizzard (310) 793-0600, **www.blizzard.com**
ETA: Christmas '97

BLADE RUNNER



Briefing: The movie is 15 years old, and the game has been in development for a while, but now it looks as though Westwood is finally making some serious progress on BLADE RUNNER—which was the most stunning-looking adventure game we previewed at E3. Set in Los Angeles in 2019, BLADE RUNNER puts you in the role of a blade runner named Ray McCoy (not Harrison Ford's character), who's attempting to deal with a mysterious upsurge of replicants. Whether to kill the replicants or help extend their lifespan is just one of the many choices you'll make throughout the game. Characters are randomly assigned as human or replicant every time you play, meaning the game won't play the same way twice—a rarity for an adventure game. Like the film, though, the highlight of the game, at least from what we saw at this point, is its amazing visual look. The awesome 3D graphics, replete with realistic lighting and environmental effects like smoke and steam, perfectly recreate the film's futuristic, noirish look.

Contact: Westwood Studios (702) 228-4040, **www.westwood.com**

ETA: November '97

ZORK GRAND INQUISITOR



Briefing: Activision's latest entry in the long-running ZORK saga has the makings of being the best since the series' conversion from text to graphic adventures earlier this decade. While RETURN TO ZORK was just too goofy, and ZORK NEMESIS was overly serious, ZORK GRAND INQUISITOR may hit just the right balance, as the development team tries to recapture the essence of what made the old text adventures so great: brain-wrenching puzzles coupled with a comic, yet engrossing, story. ZORK GRAND INQUISITOR returns you to the Great Underground Empire in the year 1067, where you find that an evil dude calling himself the "Grand Inquisitor" has taken over and banished the practice of magic. You'll need to travel back in time, along with the Dungeon Master (now imprisoned in a lantern) to sites from previous ZORK games to recover legendary treasures that will help restore magic to the land. With superb graphics, a new spellbook, and a strong tie-in to previous games, ZORK GRAND INQUISITOR should appeal to old and new fans alike. The best news is that this is just the first in a projected trilogy of games. Long live the Great Underground Empire!

Contact: Activision (310) 255-2712, **www.activision.com**

ETA: Fall '97

STARSHIP TITANIC

Briefing: After making a couple of classic text adventures for Infocom in the early 1980s, world-class author Douglas Adams hitchhiked straight out of the computer gaming galaxy, seemingly for good. At long last, he's resurfaced—and not a minute too soon. Adams' return to gaming is STARSHIP TITANIC, a goofy science-fiction romp that would make Arthur Dent feel right at home. Penned entirely by Adams, the story involves a gigantic starship from an unknown galaxy that takes off on its maiden voyage—and crashes right into your home. You board the ship and encounter all sorts of characters, including malfunctioning robots and a deranged parrot (played by *Monty Python* alum Terry Jones!). With beautiful graphics, STARSHIP TITANIC transports Adams squarely into the '90s, but isn't without some old-school gaming, either. The game features a comprehensive text parser that lets you type in conversations with the game's characters—a perfect showcase for Adams' gargantuan wit.



Contact: Simon & Schuster Interactive, **www.simonsays.com**

ETA: October '97

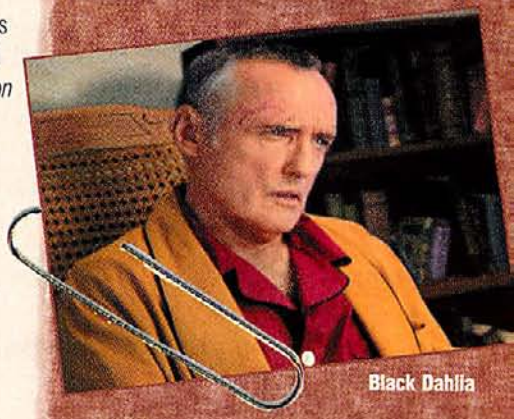
ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Sierra is calling **MASK OF ETERNITY** the latest in the KING'S QUEST series, and it *is* being written by Roberta Williams, but we're not sure how much of an adventure game it is. In an attempt to expand the game's audience, Sierra is transforming one of the oldest adventure series into a 3D-adventure/action game, complete with combat. The engine looks extremely cool, and Roberta Williams always tells a great story—so who knows? They just might pull this off.

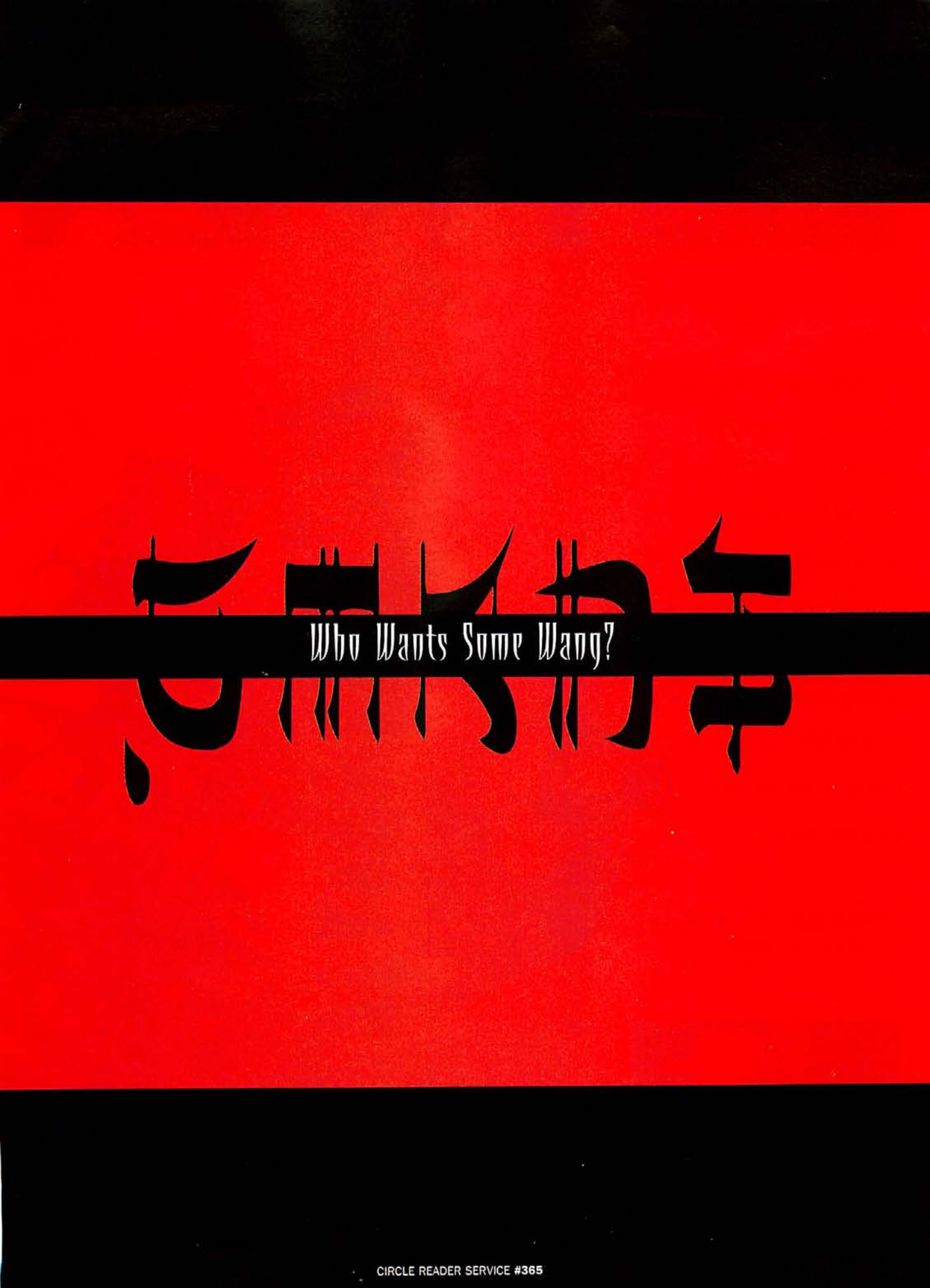
Take Two has taken on Jack The Ripper and Derek Smart—now they're ready for another horror story in **BLACK DAHLIA**. Inspired by the real-life, unsolved murder of Elizabeth Short in Los Angeles in 1947, BLACK DAHLIA puts you in the role of an agent on a global search for a barbarous serial killer. The video-based adventure features the acting talent of Dennis Hopper, and since we're scared of him, we'll say we like the game for now.

Virgin's CIRCLE OF BLOOD was one of our favorite adventures last year, but it never seemed to catch on. Fortunately, Virgin is trying again with a sequel, **BROKEN SWORD: THE SMOKING MIRROR**, which brings back George Stobbard and Nico for another round of international intrigue in stunning 2D animation.

Finally, we can't get away without mentioning **RIVEN: THE SEQUEL TO MYST**. Love it or hate it, MYST is a computer gaming phenomenon, and we, along with everyone else, will boot up the sequel when it finally ships this winter. What can the Miller brothers do with ten times the budget of MYST? And will *CGW* give the game a fair chance? Stay tuned for answers to these and other mysteries....



Black Dahlia



CIRCLE READER SERVICE #365

More levels than a Tokyo skyscraper



Tanks, bulldozers, boats, forklifts: Drive to kill



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ULTIMA ONLINE



Briefing: Chances are you've heard of this one before. The great news is that despite all sorts of rumors, setbacks, technical hurdles, and demands from impatient gamers and game journalists, ULTIMA ONLINE is forging ahead at full speed. Where it will be by the time you read this is hard to say but, at press time, Phase 1 of the public beta test had just been completed, and Richard Garriott—Lord British to you—was more than satisfied with the results. Though ULTIMA ONLINE won't be the first (or last) multiplayer online RPG on the market, it's by far the most highly anticipated, and the one most likely to really take over our lives. The online world of Brittania is going to feel so much like a real world—with a dynamic environmental and economic system, a continuously evolving social structure, and more—that many of us aren't going to be able to tell the difference. At E3, we watched our character improve his tailoring skill, find some cloth, and then make his own shirt. This is a tiny thing, of course, but it's an example of the level of detail that Origin is investing in this game. The skill-based character system (with 44 skills), the 64 spells, the macro system (which lets you automate virtually any action in the game, such as setting standard text strings)—it's all coming together beautifully. ULTIMA ONLINE is by far the most anticipated role-playing game in years. We can't wait to see you there.

Contact: EA/Origin, (800) 245-4525, **www.ultimaonline.com**

ETA: Classified

RETURN TO KRONDOR

Briefing: The official sequel to Raymond E. Feist's classic BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR was our top pick in last year's E3 roundup—but now it looks like it's finally back on track for an early '98 release. Set in the fantasy world of Feist's best-selling novels, KRONDOR's best feature is the author himself. Unlike some game licenses managed by clueless marketing weasels, Feist—a hardcore gamer himself—is directly involved in almost every aspect of the game's creation. RETURN TO KRONDOR takes us back to Midkemia, where you must recover an ancient religious artifact, the Tear of the Gods, stolen from the Ishapian Church. The game features a brand-new 3D engine, a detailed turn-based combat system, an alchemy system for creating spells, and a trap system that will test your thievery skills. The 10-chapter story promises to tell the kind of engrossing fantasy tale that Feist fans have come to expect. Let's just hope the ship date isn't a fantasy too.



Contact: 7th Level, (972) 498-8100, **www.7thlevel.com**

ETA: January '98

MIGHT & MAGIC VI

Briefing: Over the last two years, New World Computing had taken a break from their franchise RPG series to develop the addictive HEROES strategy games. Now series creator John van Caneghem and the New World team are returning to their roots with MIGHT AND MAGIC VI: THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN, the most ambitious entry to date. Set in the HEROES world of Enroth, MIGHT AND MAGIC VI concerns the disappearance of King Roland and the subsequent chaos that befalls the land. You'll man a party of up to six characters, attempting to put things right. New World has built a new 3D engine that will provide a completely immersive, first-person perspective. MIGHT AND MAGIC VI's world will be a constantly evolving one, with events occurring whether you act or not. The game will include dozens of nonlinear quests, hundreds of NPCs who will freely travel through the world, and dungeons and forest that will repopulate with monsters. If WORLD OF XEEN looked a little dated to you, fear not: MIGHT AND MAGIC VI is right on the cutting edge.



Contact: New World Computing, (818) 889-5600, **www.nwcomputing.com**

ETA: October '97

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

While ULTIMA ONLINE gets all the headlines for finally almost maybe shipping, 3DO's online world, MERIDIAN 59, is a year old already and is getting ready for a major upgrade this fall. **MERIDIAN 59: REVELATION** will be a completely new version, with new graphics, interface, quests, spells, weapons, and NPCs. The world is being greatly enlarged, including the creation of a new island city open to more experienced characters.

Meanwhile, Bill Gates, not content to own most of the real world, is getting set to conquer the online RPG world as well. Microsoft's **ASHERON'S CALL**, due to debut in early 1998, will be another massive Internet RPG—playable on Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone—with a continuing, persistent world. The game will utilize a first-person perspective and combat will be real-time. One question remains: Will Bill Gates roam the world as Lord Windowsia?



ASHERON'S CALL

By the time you read this, Interplay should have their post apocalyptic RPG **FALLOUT** out the door, and will be shifting gears to a more traditional RPG setting: TSR's AD&D world of Forgotten Realms. The game, called **BALDUR'S GATE**, uses a DIABLO-like isometric perspective, combat is real-time, and the story (which we're keeping mum about right now) will unfold over eight chapters.

Finally, the game that many of us are drooling for is Square's **FINAL FANTASY VII**, the first PC port of the RPG series that is a phenomenon in the console gaming world. At press time, FFVII was just on the verge of making its American debut on the PlayStation, but a Square spokesperson at E3 swore we'd see the PC port sometime in early '98.

WIZARDRY VIII



Briefing: Like ULTIMA and MIGHT AND MAGIC, Sirtech's WIZARDRY series is another longtime role-playing favorite that is making a grand return in the coming year. And like those other games, WIZARDRY VIII is going to be showing off a whole new look, with a brand-new high-res 3D engine. WIZARDRY VIII will complete the storyline from the previous two games, BANE OF THE COSMIC FORGE and CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT. You'll still lead a party of six on your adventures, which you can either create from scratch or import from CRUSADERS or WIZARDRY GOLD). Sirtech isn't saying a whole lot about the plot yet, but what they are saying is that they've totally revised the combat engine to include facing, ranged attacks, and phased turns (no, not real-time). They've also added area and ranged effects to the spell system, and created new professions and skills to master. Check our RPG feature next month, when we hope to get Sirtech to spill more about this major release.

Contact: Sirtech (315) 393-6451, **www.sir-tech.com**
ETA: Classified

LANDS OF LORE II: GUARDIANS OF DESTINY



Briefing: Here's another RPG that we wrote about in last year's E3 roundup that never shipped. But, like RETURN TO KRONDOR, it looks like we actually might get to play it very soon. Westwood's sequel to their popular LANDS OF LORE game will again be more of an adventure/RPG hybrid, where you take on the role of one character and follow his particular story. GUARDIANS OF DESTINY concerns the plight of Luther, son of the evil Scotia, who suffers from an uncontrollable shape-shifting curse, and must travel through the Lands to seek out the magic cure. Throughout the game you'll learn to master the shape-shifting—which can turn you into, among other things, a giant beast and a tiny lizard—and use your new forms to your advantage. The game's combat and spell system look great (the intelligent enemy AI is particularly cool), but the graphics, due to the game's long delay, are now a tad behind the times. (Call this the DAGGERFALL Syndrome.) Still, the story and gameplay look strong enough to make GUARDIANS OF DESTINY worth watching.

Contact: Westwood Studios, (702) 228-4040, **www.westwood.com**
ETA: October '97

QUEST FOR GLORY 5: DRAGON FIRE



Briefing: Yet another longtime series returns, looking better than ever. Like LANDS OF LORE, the QUEST FOR GLORY series has always been more of an adventure/RPG hybrid, and the new version, created by the series' designer Lori Cole (along with Terry Robinson) promises more of the same gameplay that has enthralled legions of fans for years. You play the role of either a warrior, mage, or thief who has been summoned to Silmaria, a city on the island kingdom of Marete. Your mission is to help discover who has assassinated the king, and to help deal with the horde of monsters, mercenaries, and—rumor has it—a giant dragon that will soon besiege the land. You'll also need to battle four other competitors in a "challenge of seven rites" to prove yourself worthy of taking the assassinated king's place. QFG 5's new features include a new 3D engine, a more flexible real-time combat system, and, most surprisingly, multiplayer support for up to eight players over a LAN, modem, or the Internet.

Contact: Sierra On-Line, (206) 649-9800, **www.sierra.com**
ETA: November '97

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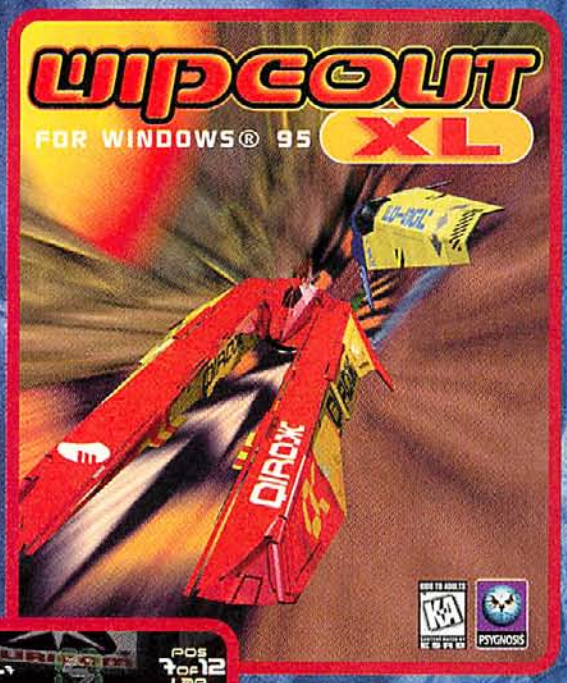
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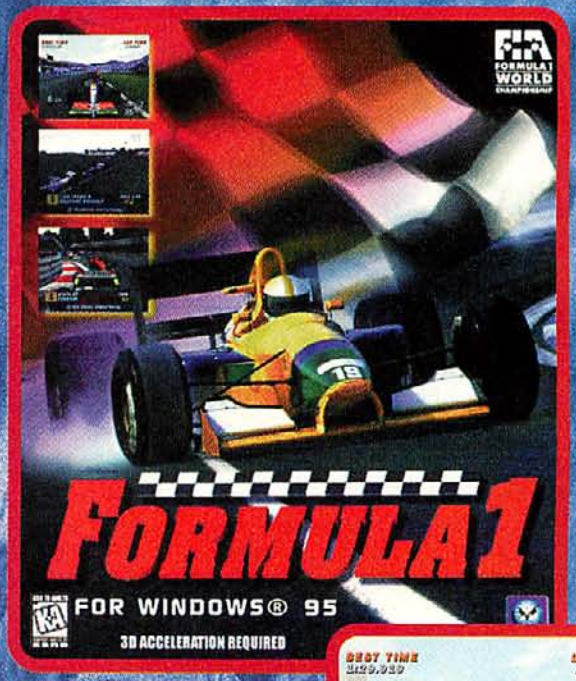


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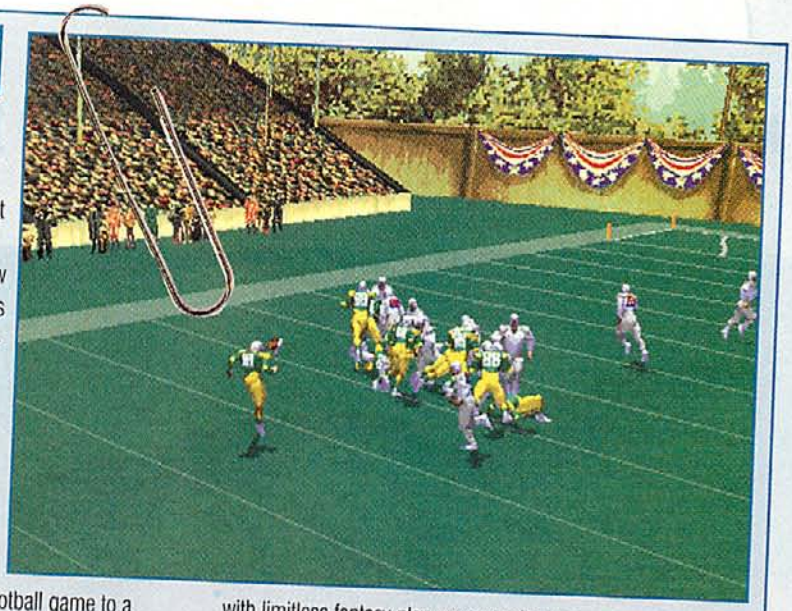
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FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

LEGENDS '98 FOOTBALL



Briefing: We wrote about this game in last year's E3 roundup (when it had "'97" in its title), and we've talked repeatedly about how great it's going to be—and now our sources say Accolade is finally serious about releasing it this fall. We hope so, because when it's released, it has the potential to be the most exciting and original sports game of the year. At a time when virtually every sports developer is striving to make the same game—characterized by the sim guys adding arcade play and the arcade guys adding better stats—Accolade is taking its football game to a completely different playing field. Here's the deal: In addition to all 30 1997 NFL teams, you get to play with all the teams from three other key years in NFL history: 1932, 1950, and 1968. Not only can you play older teams, but you can play in *their* era, with *their* rules and *their* roster sizes. Are the '97 Packers tough enough to take on the '32 Bears? And, as coach, which 25 Packers are you going to cut to fit the 1932 roster limit? Along with limitless fantasy play, you can also manage one team over multiple seasons, design custom playbooks, and, of course, play football—in crisp, beautiful 3D. We've been playing beta versions of LEGENDS for months—now we're ready for the real deal. Hey Accolade, enough already: In the immortal words of Keyshawn Johnson—just give us the damn ball!

Contact: Accolade, (408) 985-1700, **www.accolade.com**
ETA: September '97

MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D

Briefing: Strike one—it's Microsoft. Strike two—a 3D accelerator card is required. But on the third pitch, MICROSOFT BASEBALL 3D takes a Mark McGwire-like swing and belts one way deep.



With a ton of baseball games on the market, this one is drawing our attention because, thanks to Uncle Bill's bottomless pocketbook, it's a showcase title for emerging gaming technologies—in addition to the fact that it looks like a lot of fun to play. The 3D acceleration will be worth it, as the players are amazingly fluid and lifelike—unlike some other games, this is not QUAKE-ball. Microsoft is also texture-mapping real player faces on the bodies (cool or creepy—we're not sure yet) and providing force feedback support to enhance the feel of hitting or fielding a ball. Finally, the game will be playable in arcade mode over the Internet through Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. With full licensing and a top-notch interface, the game looks slick. Now let's just hope Microsoft knows its baseball.

Contact: Microsoft, (206) 882-8080, **www.microsoft.com**
ETA: October '97

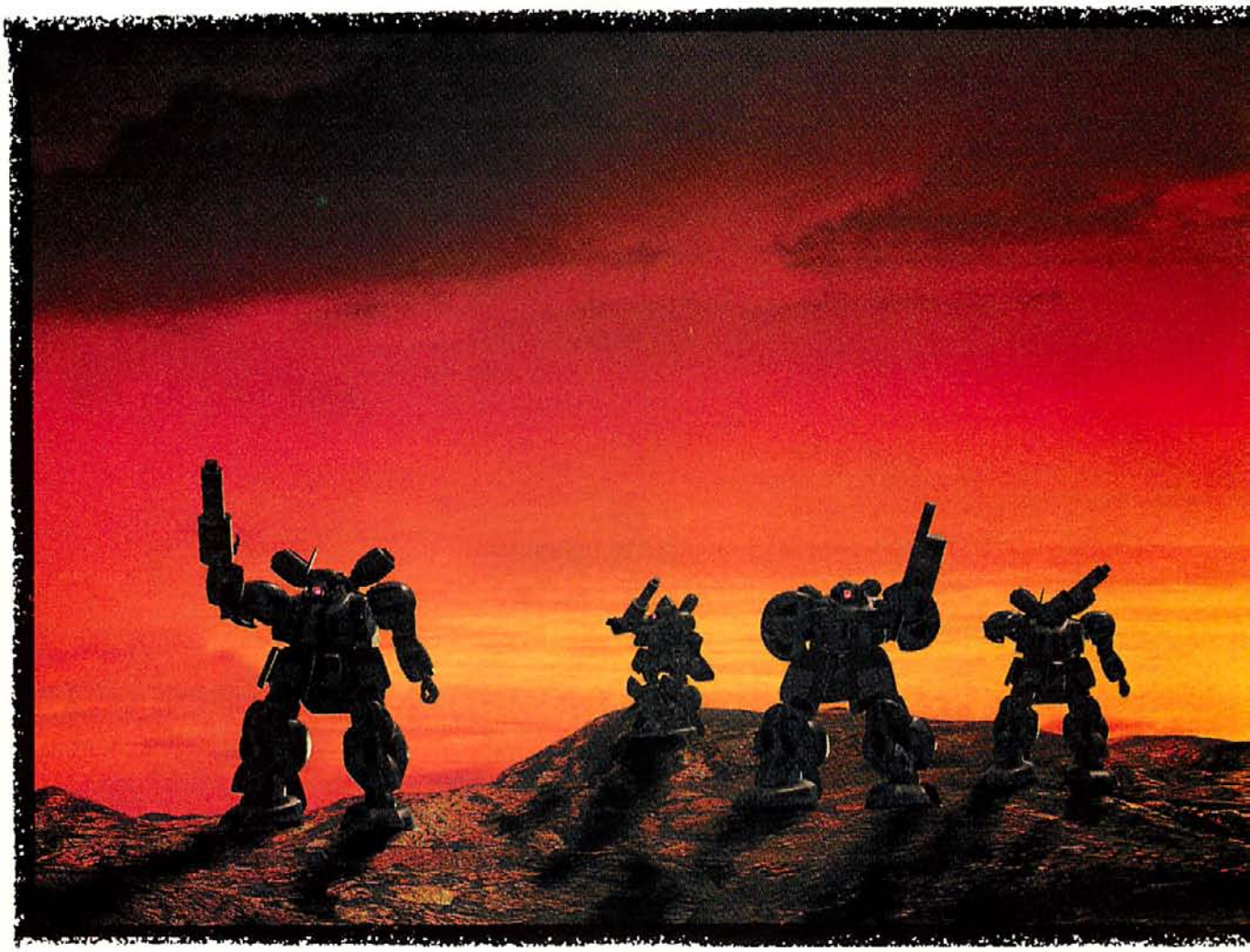
NHL 98

Briefing: EA Sports' NHL 97 was almost universally hailed for its beautiful, cutting-edge 3D graphics, but the game's AI (and bugs) left something to be desired, especially for those who actually knew something about hockey. This year, the company hopes to spruce up the brains of its winter beauty with an entirely new AI. Marc Crawford, coach of the Colorado Avalanche, was brought in to give the design team a Hockey 101 class, and it is hoped that this will be reflected in NHL 98's gameplay, with more realistic offensive and defensive coaching strategies. Other new features include an Olympic-style international tournament, dubbed "Winter Break 98," that will let you play with 14 international teams; new signature moves from the top players from each NHL team; stadium-specific audio and visuals; and the portraits of over 500 players texture-mapped onto their bodies. EA is also providing 3D acceleration and beefing up its gamepad support. If EA really succeeds in making this game as smart as it is beautiful, NHL 98 will be one killer game.



Contact: EA Sports, (415) 571-7171, **www.easports.com**
ETA: November '97

THE NEW BREED OF COMBAT UNIVERSE.



What started as a paper-based, role-playing game is about to reach epic proportions. The Heavy Gear™ universe. Perpetuated by a war between Northern and Southern Leagues. Defined by a superior war machine, the Heavy Gear. Brought to life by the producers of the #1-selling, 3-D combat simulator of all time. Heavy Gear. The new combat universe.



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JACK NICKLAUS ONLINE GOLF TOUR



Briefing: While role-playing gamers congregate in Brittania this fall, golf nuts will have the opportunity to hang out in a different part of the online world. Accolade's JACK NICKLAUS ONLINE GOLF TOUR will be a downloadable-only golf game based on the JACK NICKLAUS 4 engine. The game will let desktop duffers compete in open competition. This is not a matter of mailing in your score: This is live, online tournament play, where hundreds of foursomes can compete in realtime. Accolade will sponsor regular weekend-long tournaments, complete with prizes, and will keep your scoring history in an open database, giving you bragging rights to prove yourself as the world's best desktop golfer. New courses will be uploaded on a regular basis, and Accolade will also accept user-created courses with the JACK 4 Course Designer. Let's just hope that Tiger—who is a big-time gamer—doesn't get wind of this one. That just wouldn't be fair.

Contact: Accolade, (408) 985-1700, **www.accolade.com**

ETA: Fall '97

NHL POWERPLAY 98



Briefing: Virgin Interactive's NHL POWERPLAY '96 debuted last year to surprisingly good reviews, and became *the* game for serious hockey fans who felt burned by market godzilla NHL 97. The one bummer with the PC version was that it was 2D-only, while the Sega Saturn version offered 3D polygonal players. This year's model, NHL POWERPLAY 98, will bring the 3D action to the PC (including optional hardware acceleration) and, with better name recognition, should give EA's game another run for its money. What POWERPLAY has going for it is a strong hockey AI, with players who look like they know what they're doing. For the '98 version, Virgin motion-captured hundreds of new moves, including fake shots, hooking, deflections, and fights. The players have been scaled larger, and additional camera angles should also up the glitz factor. Other improvements include the ability to select powerplay strategies, simulate seasons, and track player stats throughout a season.

Contact: Virgin Interactive, (714) 833-8710, **www.vie.com**

ETA: October '97

MADDEN NFL 98



Briefing: Sure, we dissed last year's version of EA's most popular sports franchise—but that's only because we're real fans, and that version was really showing its age. Which is why we're as happy as anybody to tell you that MADDEN NFL 98 has the potential to return the franchise to glory. EA Sports told us that all of the previous code has been tossed, and they're starting from scratch to create a native Win-95 product, which is a huge relief for those of us who could barely get last year's kludgey code to run. Along with a new interface and 3D-polygonal players (with optional hardware acceleration), MADDEN NFL 98 is getting a new brain with a new player AI; 110-play, team-specific playbooks; and an editor for creating offensive, defensive, and special-team plays. EA is promising live Internet play and stat updates after each week's real-world games.

Contact: EA Sports, (415) 571-7171, **www.easports.com**

ETA: January '98

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

By the time you read this, Access should have **LINKS LS '98** on the shelves. The game is now Win-95 native, and includes a number of visual enhancements, more camera angles, more golfers, Internet tournament play, and—what everyone's been waiting for—much, much faster screen updates.

Microsoft is turning a lot of heads with their upcoming **CART PRECISION RACING**, which promises to deliver thrillingly realistic Indy car racing action in the setting of 17 Championship Auto Racing Teams tracks. With tracks electronically surveyed to within inches of accuracy, detailed 3D car-models, and built-in support for force-feedback joysticks, CART PRECISION RACING may be the year's most exciting racing game.



CART PRECISION RACING

Sierra's perennial heavyweight, **FPS: FOOTBALL PRO**, returns to the gridiron with a '98 version, but this year's edition, priced at just $29.95, will have more cosmetic enhancements than anything else, as well as a brand-new, more user-friendly interface. Also look for **FPS: TROPHY RIVERS**, a fly-fishing sim based on their phenomenally successful TROPHY BASS, and **FPS: SKI RACING**, previewed in the August '97 *CGW*.

Acclaim surprised many people last year with NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB, a strong arcade-style game that became the de facto choice for those disappointed in the season's other players. **NFL QUARTERBACK CLUB '98** promises major improvements over the original, including more robust roster management options, network and modem play, statistical tracking with downloadable roster updates, and playbooks that include plays designed by the game's new poster-boy, Brett Favre. All this plus the biting commentary of Marv Albert!

REAL











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FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

PICTIONARY

Briefing: Hasbro is secretly plotting with the original *Pictionary* creators to ensure that the game of quick draw retains its style and personality in the transition to silicon. Of the six different game types, our agents found the "you-draw" category the most enjoyable: Unleash the artist within you and hope that your friends can guess what you're drawing. Sources reveal, however, that if you're lousy at drawing with a pen and paper, you'll be no better with a mouse. The artistically challenged can pick up points during the other five games. In one, you have to figure out that the last word of each picture-phrase is the first word of the next; there's also a fast-buzzer round of matching words and pictures; and you can also guess what the computer's drawing for you. The game, which is set in an art gallery, with background music and party banter to enhance the ambiance, offers single-player, multiplayer, and team play with hotseat, Internet, and LAN capabilities.



Contact: Hasbro Interactive, (508) 921-3700, **www.hasbro.com**
ETA: September '97

SMART GAMES CHALLENGE #2

Briefing: Try though they might, the brainiacs at Smart Games, Inc. were unable to keep their plans secret from our operatives. CHALLENGE #2 will feature 20 brand new puzzles, each with 30 levels. Among the 600 brain-busters are *Odyssey*, in which you must discover the correct path across a grid, or get stuck on a never-ending journey; *Pipeline*, a strategy puzzle for cerebral plumbers; and *The Fool's Jewels*, a spatial puzzle in which you must remove all the pieces of coal, leaving behind only jewels. Other hidden delights are jumbled picture puzzles, scrambled soundbytes, and over 800 trivia questions.



Contact: Smart Games Inc., (800) 788-8815, **www.smartgames.com**
ETA: October '97

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK 3 & YOU DON'T KNOW JACK TV

Briefing: Data intercepted from Berkeley Systems reveals that JACK 3's new question types include Threesomes, a multiplayer version of the Dis or Dat question; Impossible Questions; Fiber Optic Field Trips To The Dead; and a What Is This? picture question (a picture of an everyday object taken from a unusual angle). Level-10 couch potatoes take note: JACK TV features renovated graphics and greater customization. If you decide to play on a weekend, for example, your host may greet you with remarks like "Hey loser, why are you staying home on a Saturday Night?" Agents are encouraged to investigate in parties of two or more to ensure sufficient backup.

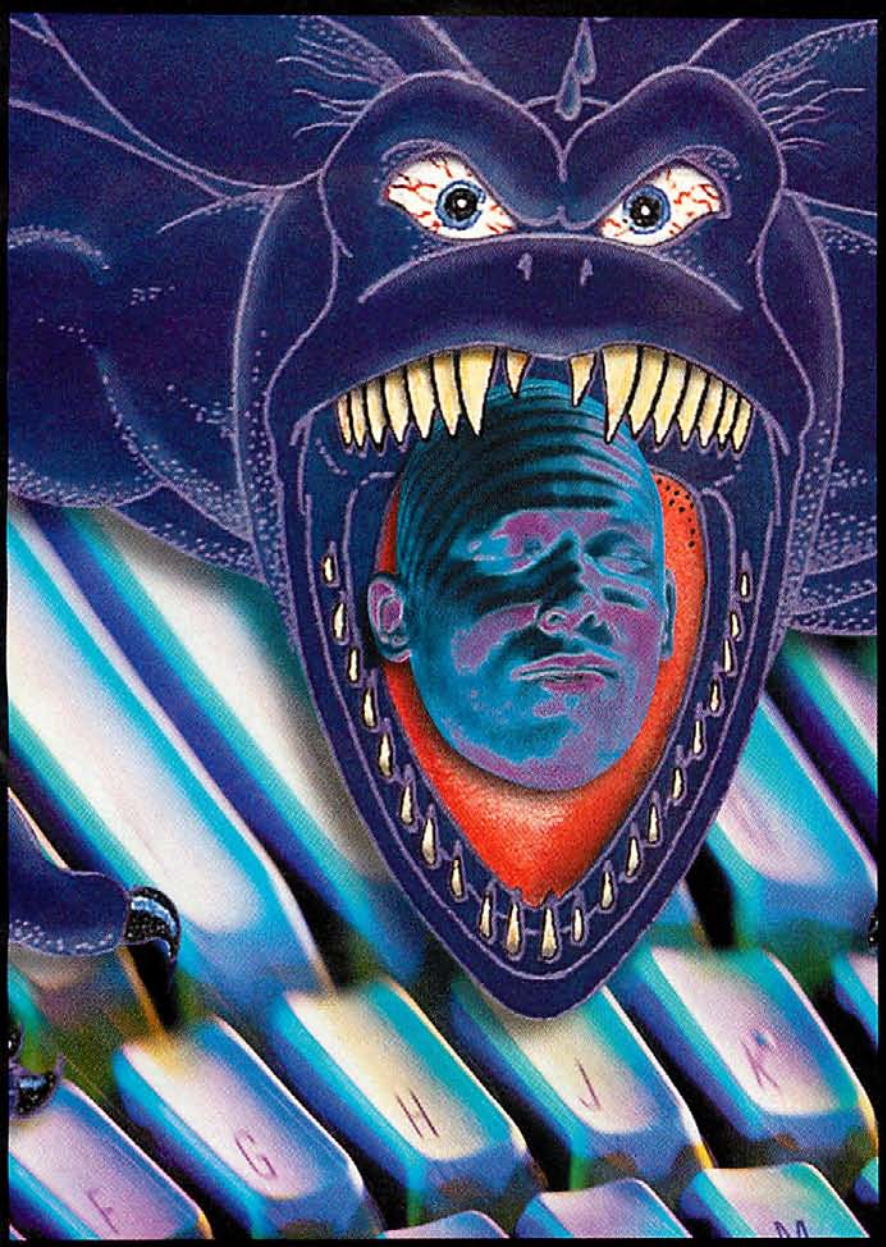


Contact: Berkeley Systems, (510) 540-5535, **www.berkeleysystems.com**
ETA: September/October '97

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Our operatives unmasked **LOSE YOUR MARBLES** as a clever TETRIS-clone in which you clear your marbles (before your opponent can clear his) by lining up three or more of the same color. LOSE YOUR MARBLES will be available from SegaSoft in September, and is playable hotseat or LAN. Other top-secret Hasbro projects include **BOGGLE** (October), **SORRY!** (November), and for those who just can't get enough of Luke, Leia, and Co., a ***Star Wars*** edition of **MONOPOLY**—complete with footage from the recently restored *Star Wars* trilogy. Finally, the chess wars continue, with Mindscape's **CHESSMASTER 5500** and Sierra's innovative **POWER CHESS '98**.





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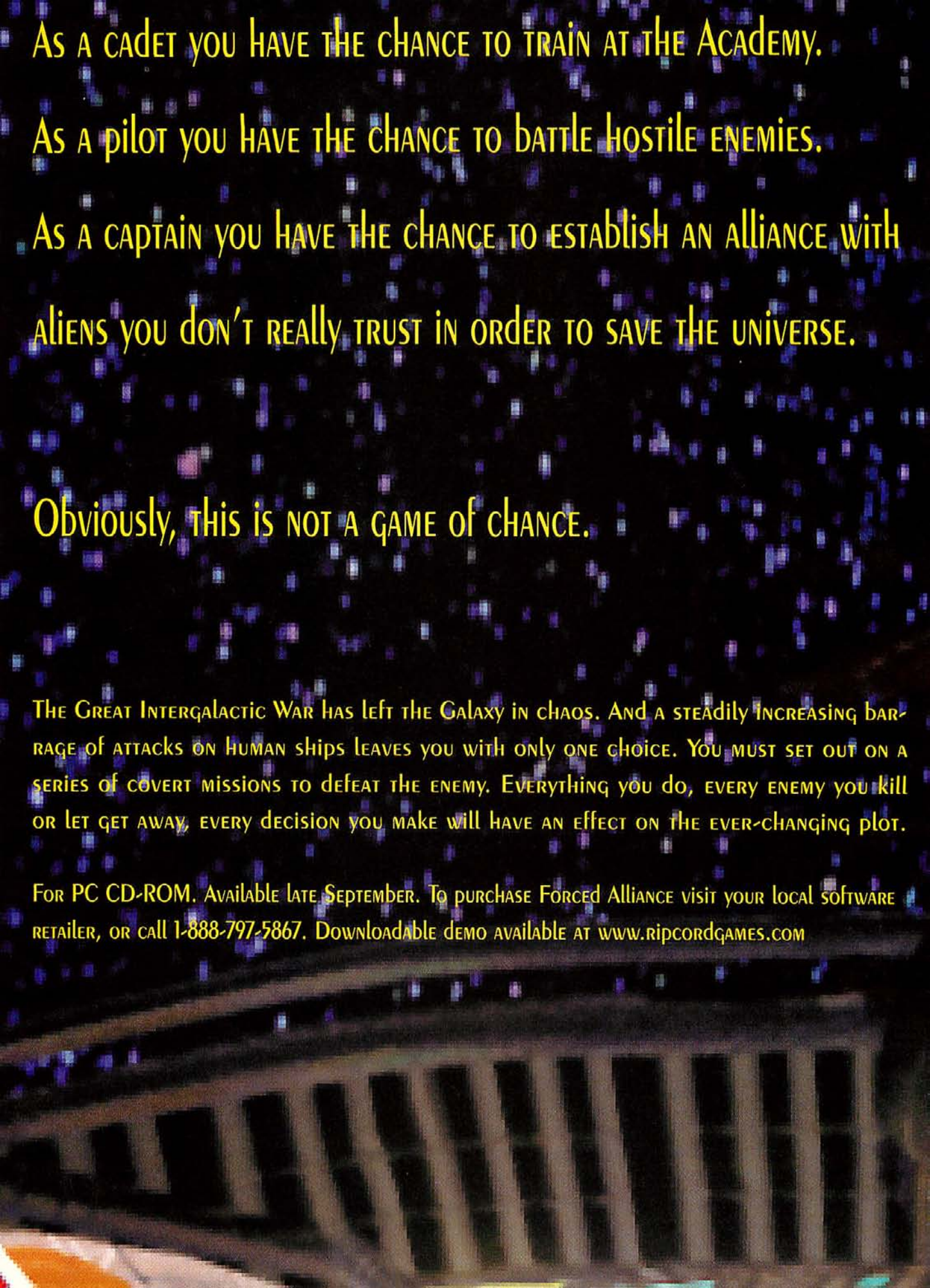
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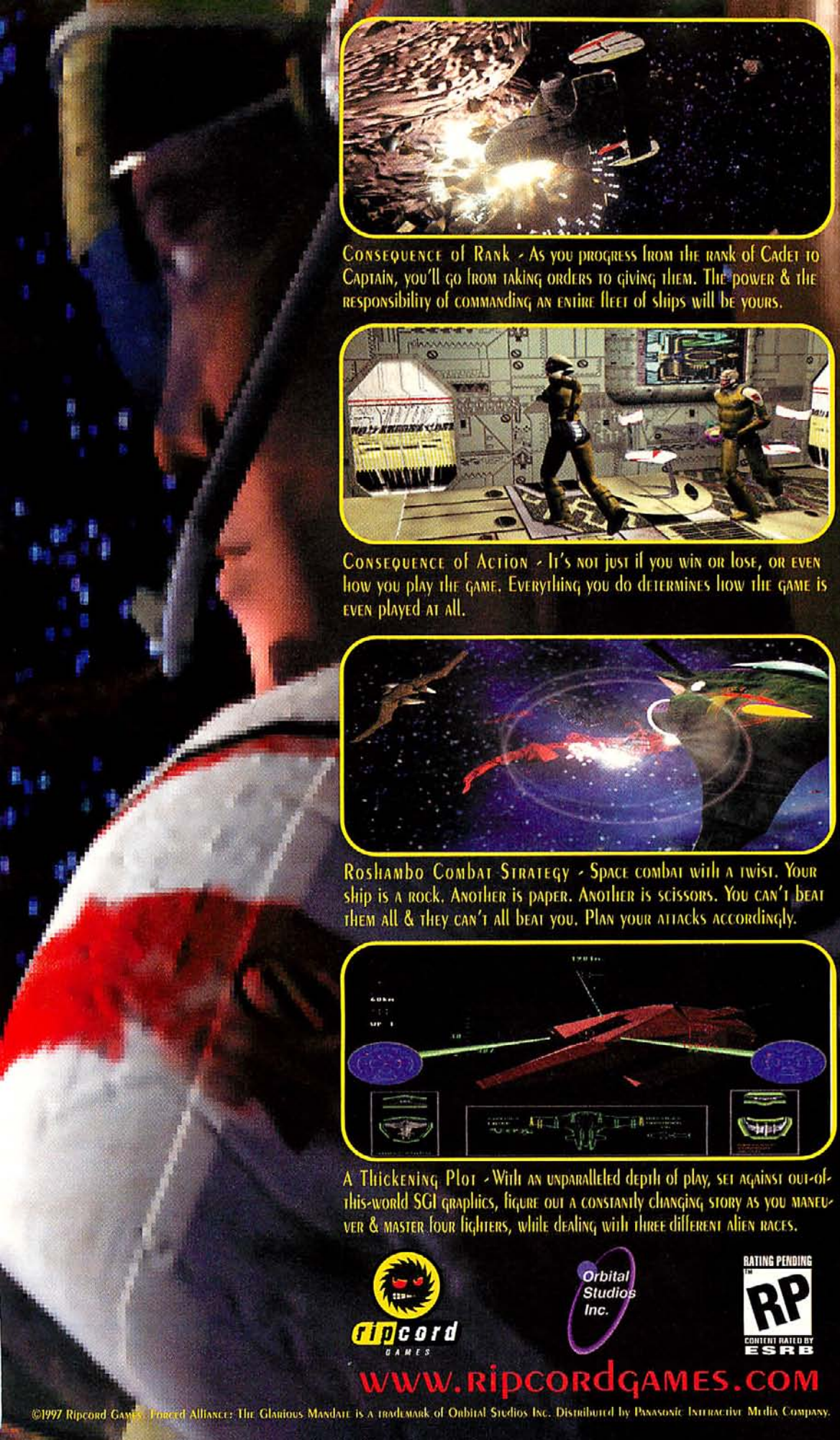
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M1 TANK PLATOON II



Briefing: MicroProse kept the surprise sim hit of the E3 show under need-to-know security throughout its development in an effort to make a big splash when it was revealed, and all that secrecy had its desired effect. Due in the first half of 1998, M1 TANK PLATOON II is a worthy successor to the original, maintaining its parent's feature set and platoon management system, all the while adding modern AI and all the requisite bells and whistles. PLATOON II sports glorious graphics (what we thought was the 3D-hardware version of the game was, in fact, the 2D version) in addition to beefed-up gameplay. Written on P90s, it's aimed at mid-range machines with 2D cards, but even better imagery awaits 3D-card owners. Viewing distance extends to an unprecedented 10km, allowing realistic engagement ranges.

PLATOON II sports five dynamic campaigns that follow actual military doctrine. In addition, a dozen scripted missions recreate Gulf War and other historic battles. In the campaign, you act as a platoon sergeant, and you can set waypoints (with wait time, action state, and formation settings) in the battle builder. You can also create scripted battles with this tool. Crew management is important; you'll promote and transfer crewmembers as necessary. Seventy vehicles, more than 80 weapons systems, and eight types of ground troops are modeled.

Eight-player network support features head-to-head battles as well as co-op play. In this mode, players can drive Challengers, Warriors, Leopards, and Martyrs as well as M1A2s.

Contact: MicroProse, (800) 695-4263, **www.microprose.com**

ETA: First half of '98

LONGBOW 2.0

Briefing: Gathering intelligence on LONGBOW 2.0 was a snap—it was the buzz of E3. On display in full-size replicas of AH-64D cockpits, the helicopter sim wowed showgoers with its all-new 3Dfx-supporting graphics engine. You can now fly the OH-58D Kiowa scout and UH-60L Blackhawk utility helicopters in addition to the AH-64D; cooperative and antagonistic multiplayer support allows a pilot and gunner to fly in a single helicopter. (QUAKE fans will love the Blackhawk's door gun.)



The game looks particularly good during night missions, with dynamic lighting from missiles, explosions, and flames illuminating the landscape. Plus, this title sports the most convincing night-vision-goggles display seen yet. Day missions are just as impressive, with four times the graphics detail of the original and a virtual cockpit from which to view that rich detail. LONGBOW 2.0 isn't just about graphics, though. The game features an entirely new dynamic campaign engine with battles set in Iraq/Azerbaijan and at the Army's National Training Center.

Contact: Jane's Combat Simulations, (415) 571-7171, **www.janes.ea.com**

ETA: Fall '97

F-22 AIR DOMINANCE FIGHTER



Briefing: The subject code-named TFX3:F-22 has been split into two products: DID F-22 AIR DOMINANCE FIGHTER (ADF) and F-22 TOTAL AIR WAR (TAW). Apparently the campaign in this EF2000 sequel was so ambitious, the developers determined they wouldn't be able to get it finished in time for the October '97 ship date. So, they split the original $60 product into two, the $40 ADF sim and the $20 TAW add-on. ADF, which features the most impressive terrain graphics of any jet sim we've seen, lets you fly the F-22 and send orders to aircraft from an AWACS station. ADF will feature three tours of duty, single missions, and an instant-action setup, as well as multiplayer combat. Thorough ACMI combat replays are available. No more static ground targets here—look for tanks kicking up dust as they move across the desert to take ground objectives. The TAW expansion pack, due out a couple of months after ADF, will add a fully dynamic, real-time campaign, as well as an enhanced mission planner.

Contact: Digital Image Design, (301) 916-9302, **www.did.com**

ETA: October '97 (ADF), January '98 (TAW)

IA10 WARTHOG

Briefing: Our investigators weren't able to ferret out many details on this follow-up to Interactive Magic's IF-22, as IA-10 WARTHOG isn't slated to ship until the first quarter of '98. A mole within the company told us that the sim will feature an improved version of the graphics engine introduced in IF-22. This time around, human-drawn art will be used instead of satellite imagery, since the latter pixelates at the low altitudes at which the A-10 attack jet flies. Campaigns will be dynamic, in the vein of IF-22, but with more control over mission orders and target selection; you'll be able to manage attacks at the squadron commander level. You'll fly missions over Kuwait, as well as two of the IF-22 combat theaters (which are yet to be determined). It appears that "Wild Bill" Stealey is on the way to creating an electronic battlefield on the Internet, although Interactive Magic has yet to announce any intentions to do so. But with the F-22, A-10, and M1A2 Abrams modeled, and considering the company's ambitious plans for its I-Magic Online division, plus the fact that all these sims sport multiplayer capabilities, the idea doesn't seem that farfetched.



Contact: Interactive Magic, (919) 461-0722,
www.imagicgames.com
ETA: First quarter '98

F-16 AGGRESSOR

Briefing: Just hours before E3 started, Virgin signed the new F-16 sim from General Simulations, Inc., a company launched by DID cofounder Phil Allsop. F-16 AGGRESSOR features an odd combination of realistic flight dynamics and a storyline straight out of Hollywood. You play a near-future mercenary pilot flying missions in various African states. (This isn't that wild; a recent issue of *World Air Power Journal* documented mercenary pilots flying modern jets and helicopters in African conflicts.) You've been hired by a Greenpeace-style organization to further its causes through the use of a little force. Despite the fanciful premise, the developers are striving for dead-on realism in the plane's performance. The flight model is being designed by a team that has done simulation work for the U.S. military. Joystick response is designed to precisely simulate the stick in the real F-16, where a certain amount of stick movement applies a precise G force to the plane's movement. Color depths up to 32 bits will be supported on 3D cards.



Contact: Virgin Interactive, (714) 833-8710, **www.vie.com**
ETA: Fall '97

JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER

Briefing: The Joint Strike Fighter (usually referred to as JSF) is slated to go into service soon after the turn of the century. This stealthy jet will replace F-16, F/A-18, and Harrier aircraft in the Navy, Air Force, Marines, and UK Royal Navy. Currently, both Lockheed-Martin and Boeing are building prototype aircraft to compete for the JSF contract. This new sim from Eidos will let you engage in your own flyoff between the two models in five different dynamic campaigns. The terrain is absolutely breathtaking in detail, with smooth hills, trees scattered about, and hundreds of structures in cities—yet it runs at a silky-smooth frame rate at 512x384 resolution with no 3D card on a P166. The smoothness of the graphics has to be seen to be believed. JSF seems targeted more at the action simmer than the hard-core; this is backed up by the developers giving the JSF prototypes bogus X-32 and X-35 designations. Still, if you're looking for fast aerial action in an immersive environment, JSF should be worth close investigation.



Contact: Eidos Interactive, (415) 547-1200,
www.eidosinteractive.com
ETA: October '97

JANE'S F-15

Briefing: Although the game was featured in-depth in *CGW*'s July '97 cover story, we were able to get more details on this realistic F-15E simulation. Perhaps the biggest news is that multiplayer and 3D cards will be supported in the release version. Because 3D support is being implemented late in the game, you'll still be able to fly at a smooth frame rate even without hardware acceleration. Depending on available time and the complexity of coordinating hundreds of targets across a network, multiplayer may be limited to head-to-head combat in the initial release; we wouldn't be surprised to see cooperative play in an add-on pack, though. We also got a look at some of the minutiae that will please detail hounds: accurate tail insignia for each squadron, all the way down to the proper serial numbers for each aircraft; optional resource management in the war, forcing you to decide whether you really need to bring along those expensive laser-guided bombs; and flight modeling that's already the most impressive we've seen in a jet sim.



Contact: Jane's Combat Simulations, (415) 571-7171,
www.janes.ea.com
ETA: First quarter '98

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FALCON 4.0



Briefing: We've had FALCON 4.0 under surveillance since late 1995, and our latest intelligence indicates that the product is indeed in danger of actually shipping sometime after the holiday season. The feature set for this serious F-16C simulation continues to come together, with its fully dynamic campaign up and running, many of the plane's systems implemented (we saw impressive air-to-air radar modes, although air-to-ground systems are still being developed), and numerous highly detailed ground objects in place at airbases. Given the ambitiousness of the game's multiplayer campaign, which lets pilots jump into missions in progress on a LAN or via the Ten online gaming service, our impression is that FALCON 4.0's developers could end up spending a lot of time debugging the multiplayer aspects of the game. Still, a worst-case scenario is probably first-quarter 1998. The game promises to be worth the wait, with the realism and AI you'd expect from the FALCON series, innovative multiplayer features, and breathtaking visuals and sound effects.

Contact: MicroProse, (800) 695-4263, **www.microprose.com**
ETA: First Quarter '98

FIGHTER SQUADRON: SCREAMIN' DEMONS OVER EUROPE



Briefing: Take a flight and physics model that makes the acclaimed modeling in A-10 CUBA! look primitive, layer on a two-years-in-the-making 3D engine, and finish off with a mission planner that gives you complete control over the air war, and you already have the potential for a standout sim. Add an Open Plane Interface that lets technically savvy users import their own aircraft in addition to the nine meticulously modeled planes included with the sim, and you have the QUAKE of flight simulations. FIGHTER SQUADRON should address all the complaints about A-10 CUBA! with its mission editor, textured graphics, and thick, paper manual. It features three combat regions over which to fly: the English Channel, North Africa, and Germany. Aircraft include the P-51 Mustang, B-17 Flying Fortress, P-38 Lightning, Hawker Typhoon, Avro Lancaster, De Havilland Mosquito, Messerscmitt Bf-109 and Me-262, and the Junkers Ju-88. Realism maniacs be warned: Although the physics should be right on, the combat arenas have been compressed to allow you to get right into the action, eliminating the need to fly in real-time to the target.

Contact: Activision, (310) 255-2000, **www.activision.com**
ETA: November '97

FLYING CORPS GOLD



Briefing: Developer Rowan is slated to have released both 3D and multiplayer patches for Empire's FLYING CORPS sim by the time you read this. Those aren't the only enhancements in store for this WWI sim, though. A new version, FLYING CORPS GOLD, will incorporate those improvements and a number of others. These include a mission editor that allows you to create your own scenarios; place aircraft, balloons, tanks, AAA, and buildings throughout the world; and direct ground and air activity across the front. The game will feature new aircraft, including the Fokker D-VII, as well as support for force-feedback joysticks such as the CH Products Force FX. Also, the artificial intelligence is being fine-tuned (this improvement should also be present in the patch), equipping your wingmen with better performance—and a clue.

Contact: Empire Interactive, (301) 916-9302, **www.empire-us.com**
ETA: October '97

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

With at least 23 flight sims alone on display at E3 and more than 30 in development, it's going to be a great year for simulation fans. (Although perhaps not as good a year for those fighting for their share of the market's dollars.)

Dynamix looks ready to remake its name as a top-notch sim designer with **Red Baron II**, **Aces X-Fighters** (which was running at the show in 3Dfx splendor), and **Sierra Pro Pilot**. Along with **iF-16** (previewed in this issue) and **iA-10 Warthog**, Interactive Magic was also showing **iPanzer '44**. This



IPANZER '44

World War II tank sim comes from the designers of iM1A2 ABRAMS and will feature infantry, trees, and a wide variety of WWII tanks and support vehicles. Sixteen-bit color graphics and a multiplayer mode with Sherman, Panzer, and Russian T-34 tanks round out this title.

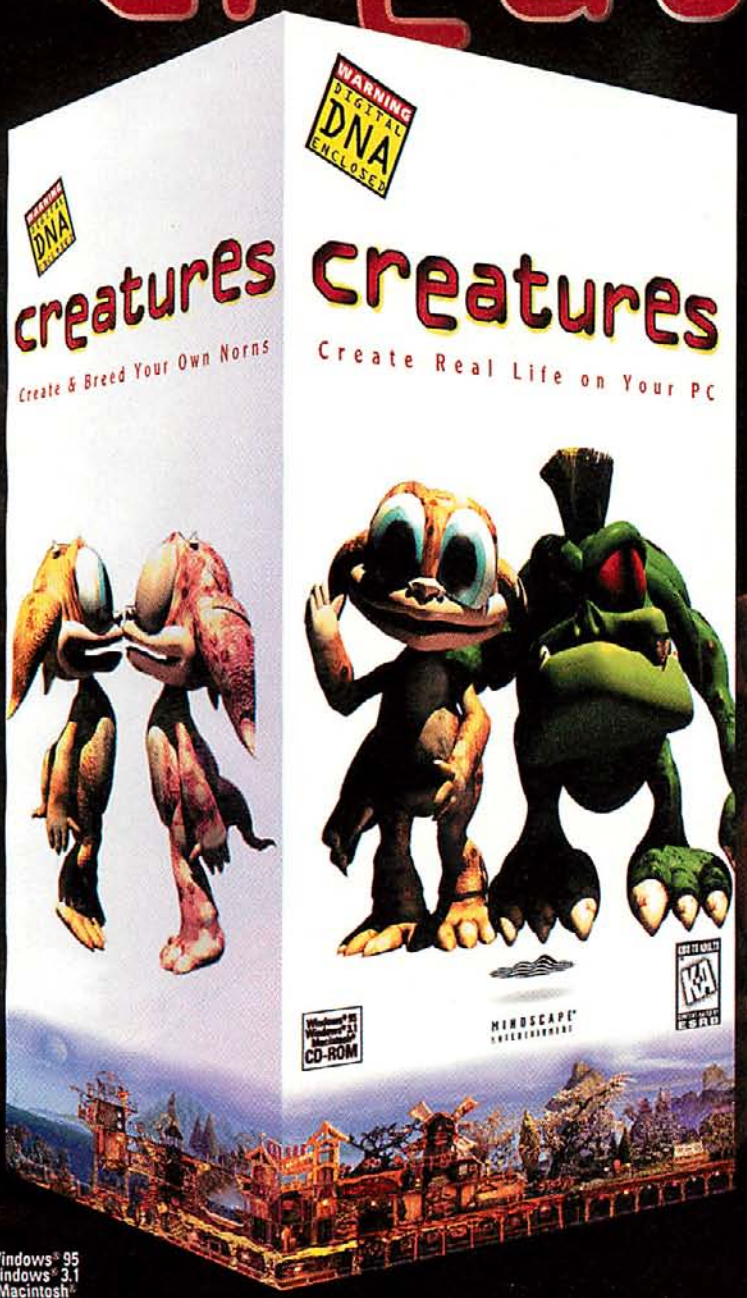
Virgin's **Sabre Ace** was one of many new sims on display with support for force-feedback joysticks, and Looking Glass pleased sim fans by confirming Direct 3D support in **Flight Unlimited II**. (Even the early 3D version was disturbingly real on a 3Dfx card.) MicroProse's **European Air War** has also received the 3D treatment; it will support 3Dfx Voodoo and Rendition Verite-based cards. Another bonus in EAW is the capability to modify your plane's nose art.

Along with **JSF**, Eidos had **Flying Nightmares 2** and **Team Apache** on display; the latter helicopter sim had spectacular graphics, but had HUD features which made it look a bit less seriously modeled than LONGBOW 2. Notably absent from the floor was the **Confirmed Kill** online sim.

For info on Microsoft's **Fighter Ace** and **Flight Simulator 98**, see Denny Atkin's column elsewhere in this issue.

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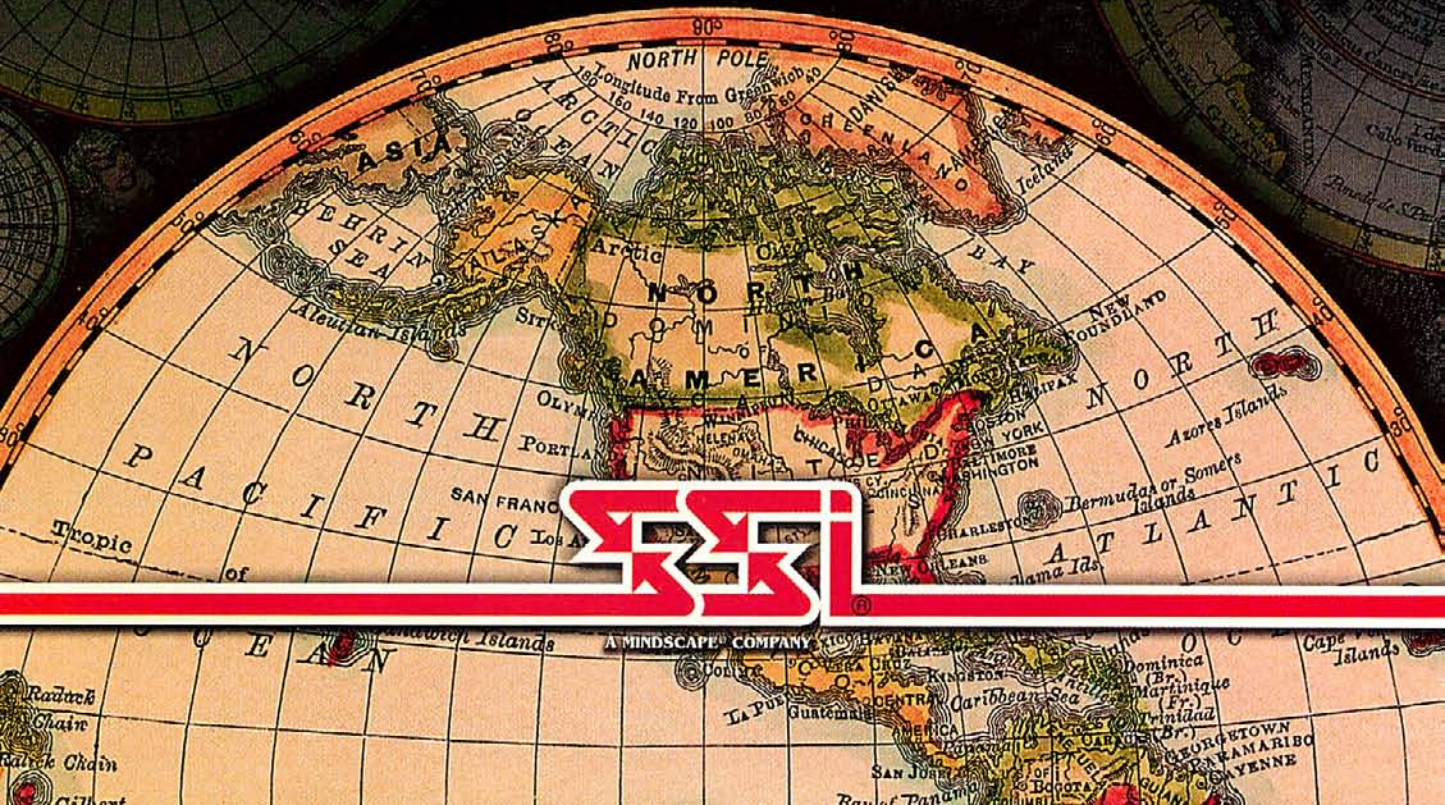
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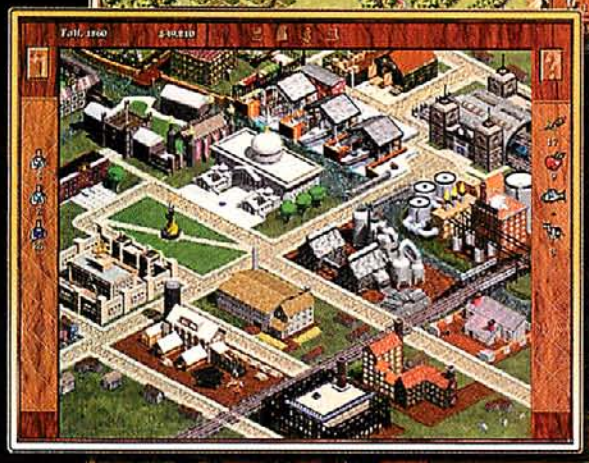


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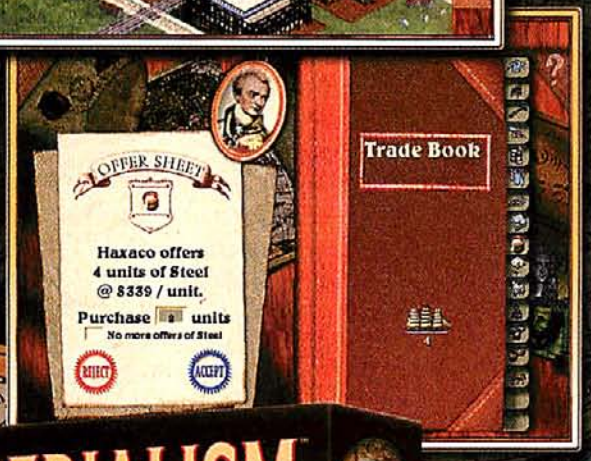
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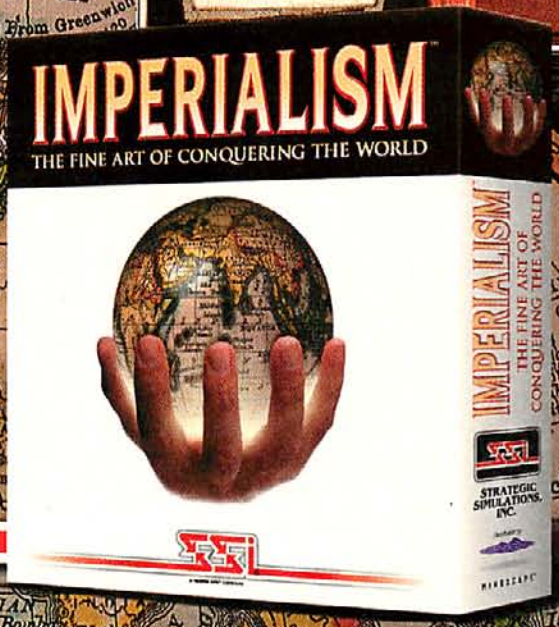
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WINDOWS® 95 & MAC™ OS CD-ROM



WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY



Briefing: WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY (don't call it WING COMMANDER V in front of the development team) was a single vote away from winning our "Best of Show" crown, which was snagged by QUAKE II. And if we were a bit more wimpy, we'd have called it a tie. Because while QUAKE II takes a popular game concept and fine-tunes it into something wonderful, WING COMMANDER: PROPHECY takes a popular game concept, blows it to smithereens, and reassembles the parts into a new archetype that redefines and refreshes a stagnating space-simulation genre.

Fear not, WING COMMANDER fans, this game still has the proper flavor. This time around, though, you're not "Old Bluehair" or Mark Hamill (although you do get to interact with Blair in the game). But while the character has changed, you're still a pilot for the Confederation, Tom Wilson's Maniac is still around to make life annoying, Ginger Lynn Allen's mechanic is still around to make life exciting, and the universe is still counting on your piloting skills and charm to keep it intact.

The big difference is that this time the game is more about the *game* than about the *movies*. Cinematics take the back seat to a new game engine that immerses you like never before in the battle to save the Confederation. Certainly, there are still video interludes, but as the development team put it, "Before, the movies drove the game. This time, the game drives the movies."

It seems the Prophets of Kilrah had predicted the end of their world. Unfortunately, they also predicted that evil would devour the universe soon after the destruction of Kilrah. Origin is still staying mum on the name and look of the alien race you'll face, but the game's designers assure us that they're not big, cute kitties this time around. In fact, the designers enlisted Sid Mead, the designer behind the looks of *Blade Runner* and *2010*, to create an alien race so frightening, so disgusting, that you'll take special pleasure in disintegrating it. We did see the alien ships in action, and we were impressed with their *Babylon 5*-esque organic appearance.

Look for more dynamic mission branching as the game progresses—you're not as likely to feel as if you're being pulled down a path (as was the case in previous games). In addition, missions don't always end in victory or defeat; there can be degrees of win/loss. Finally, look for missions of more realistic scope and length. A capital ship won't be knocked out by a single torpedo (no matter what Col. Blair tells you about his experiences in a past life); you may need five missions to get past its defenders and take the ship out.

Along with the primary plot, look for multiplayer combat. Multiplayer mode features dynamic entry, so you can join a mission already in progress; optional power-ups, so you can pick up missiles and other enhancements as you battle; and a spectator camera that lets you watch the action if the game you want to join is full, or if you want to see how the masters do it.

A variety of new ships will spice up both single- and multiplayer combat with very different flying characteristics, which should prevent boring turning-fights. The Panther, for instance, vectors its thrust from side to side, so it's very maneuverable in the yaw plane. The Vampire, on the other hand, excels in pitch response.

The game engine itself shows major tuning. We witnessed it running at smooth frame rates with glorious dynamic lighting and 16-bit color. Yet both systems were running vanilla P133s, and only one had a 3D card. Numerous enhancements have also been made to the interface to remove combat annoyances—look for one-button adjustments for power reallocations, shield adjustment, and so on.

Origin may have pulled off the unlikely here, creating a game with enough WING COMMANDER flavor to keep fans satisfied, but providing a very different, gameplay-oriented experience that will engage even those WING III fans who wrote off WING IV as just being more of the same.

Contact: Origin, (415) 571-7171, **www.origin.ea.com**
ETA: Fall '97

EARTHSIEGE 3

Briefing: Sierra's Dynamix division pioneered the PC giant robot sim genre when it created the original MECHWARRIOR for Activision. Now they're back with a vengeance, no longer content to allow the EARTHSIEGE series to play second fiddle to the competition. EARTHSIEGE 3 promises a better storyline, an enriched environment, and a top-notch graphics engine.

In addition to Hercs (giant robots) and fliers, you can also pilot tanks, armored scouts, and hovercraft. Over 50 components are available for vehicle customization. Cybrid vehicles now feature an eerie, biomechanical appearance, and you'll fight them on dazzling 16-bit color rolling scenery. Plus, the transition to combat in interior locations is seamless.

Other features include comprehensive 3D-graphics card support, 3D sound, and Windows NT and multiprocessor support.

The EARTHSIEGE series has been accused of being "lighter" than MECHWARRIOR in part due to its less-developed backstory. Dynamix hired science-fiction author David Bischoff, whose credits include coauthoring *Tin Man* (one of the best episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*), to pen a background bible for the series. The mission structure is nonlinear; there are plot-focused missions, but between them you can take any number of other missions to fill your coffers and upgrade your forces.



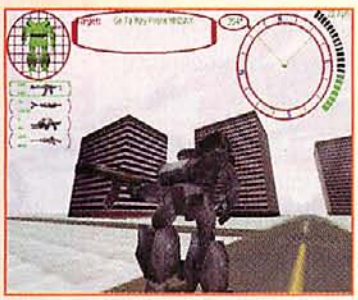
Contact: Sierra/Dynamix, (800) 757-7707, **www.sierra.com**
ETA: November '97

HEAVY GEAR

Briefing: With the MECHWARRIOR license passing to MicroProse, Activision was forced to look for a new universe for its giant robot series. HEAVY GEAR, the resulting game, is an intriguing mix of the familiar and the new.

The game's engine has elements which smack of the MECHWARRIOR series, but it's seen massive updating. On standard graphics cards, the textures look much better than before, although the game really shines on a 3D card. The deformable terrain features rolling hills that should make for valuable cover in multiplayer games.

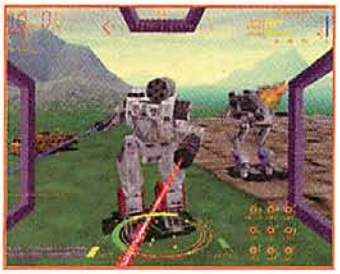
Play is a bit different, since the Gears actually carry their weapons. (Yes, a giant robot carrying a giant gun seems quite silly, but Gears were originally designed as construction machines and don't have room for internal weaponry.) Control is much more fluid than in MECHWARRIOR II; your Gears can crouch, sidestep, and are maneuverable enough to perform their own version of the QUAKE strafing maneuver.



Contact: Activision, (310) 255-2000, **www.activision.com**
ETA: Fall '97

MECHWARRIOR III

Briefing: The MECHWARRIOR series' third developer is the company that created the BATTLETECH universe, FASA. Because of that, indications are that this game will be the truest to the universe's lore. And although the game isn't slated to ship until next year, it's already looking well-armed for the upcoming market battle.



MECHWARRIOR III will feature 18 Mech chassis, 4 of which were designed by FASA specifically for this game. Of course, each Mech can be completely customized—not only in equipment, but in paint job as well. You'll even be able to create your own decals. The Mechs themselves will offer new flexibility—articulated arms that let you fire to the side when looking to the side, without having to twist your Mech's torso.

Look for a universe with better physical modeling than in previous MECHWARRIOR games. You'll not only traverse hills and valleys, but also fight battles in small towns and big cities. Trees and infantry are other welcome additions. Your Mech can enter the water, and doing so will give you a cooling advantage. Equipment modeling sees new detail as well. For instance, lasers actually act like lasers instead of the "energy projectile" weapons common in computer games. Firing is instantaneous, allowing slicing attacks.

The campaign will be fully dynamic. As a Lance Commander, you'll be able to set all mission parameters and waypoints. A random mission generator and several canned missions will be available as well.

Contact: MicroProse, (800) 695-4263, **www.microprose.com**
ETA: First half '98

THE 10TH PLANET

Briefing: THE 10TH PLANET features strategic elements new to the space sim genre. Refreshingly, instead of zooming through deep space, you'll actually be defending Earth from alien invasion this time around. It's up to you, the lone survivor of an alien attack, to help save your home planet.

The ability to fully customize your spaceship is an exciting feature in THE 10TH PLANET. You can install more than 100 pieces of equipment—engines, weapons, computers, shields, and the like. This should make the game's multiplayer mode particularly popular.

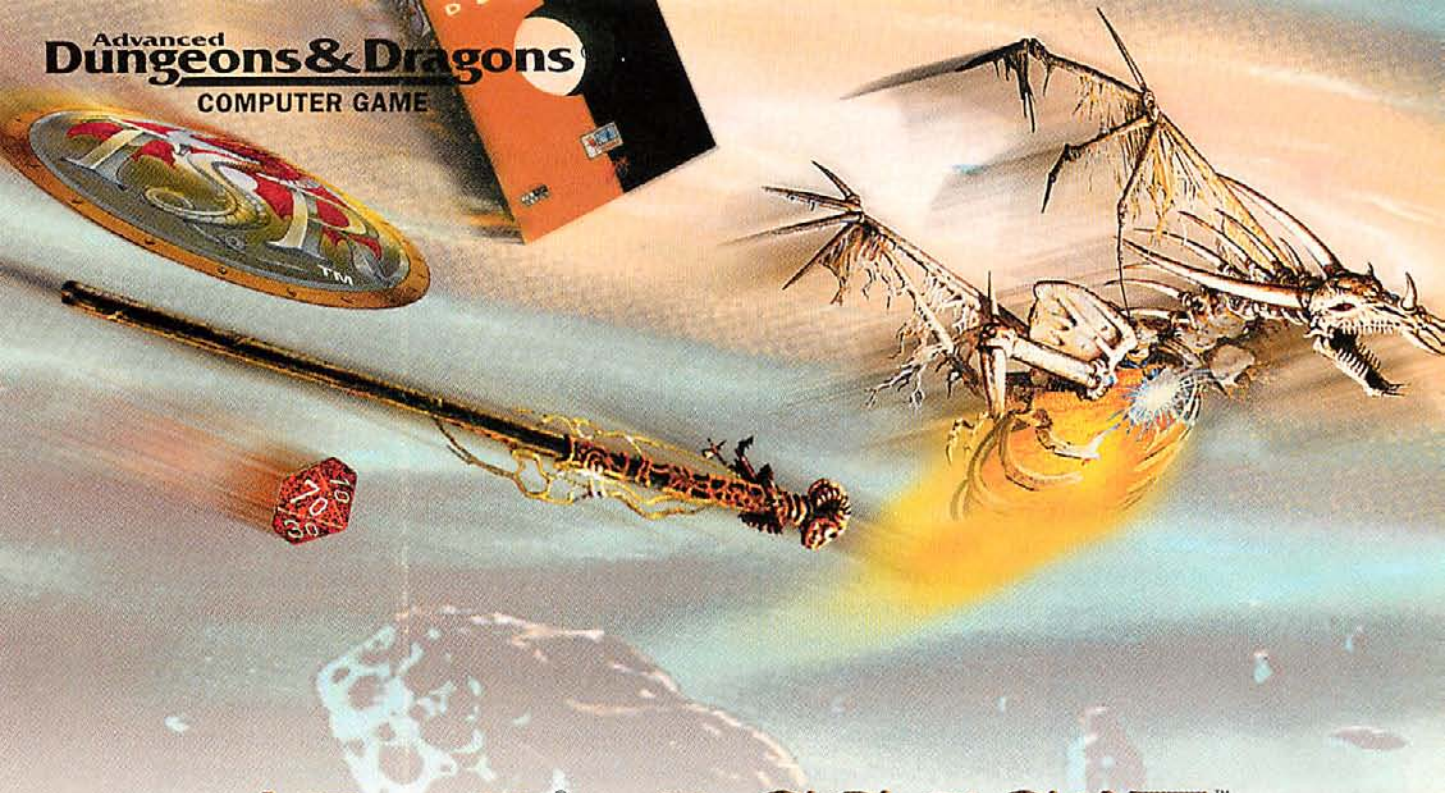
The game is nonlinear. Instead of being led through a series of missions, you'll be able to utilize a strategic simulation and base management system to make your own plan of attack. You'll also be able to research and use alien technology to get the jump on the bad guys.

Although the game is far more than just a space shooter, it excels at good old-fashioned combat. The game sports 3D card and force-feedback joystick support and a particle system for flying debris.



Contact: Bethesda Softworks, (800) 677-0700, **www.bethsoft.com**
ETA: Fourth quarter '97

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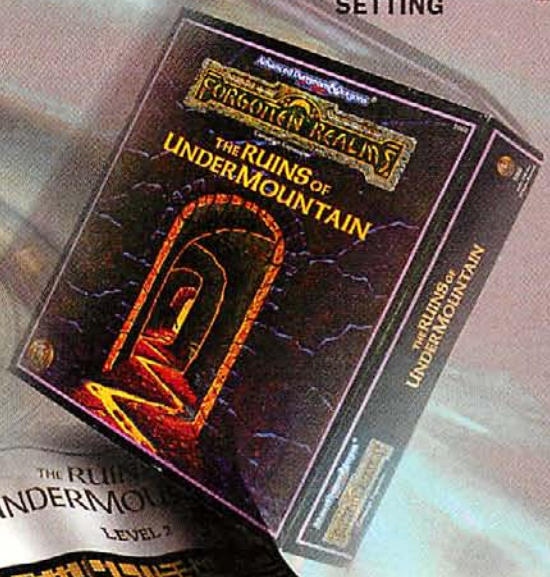


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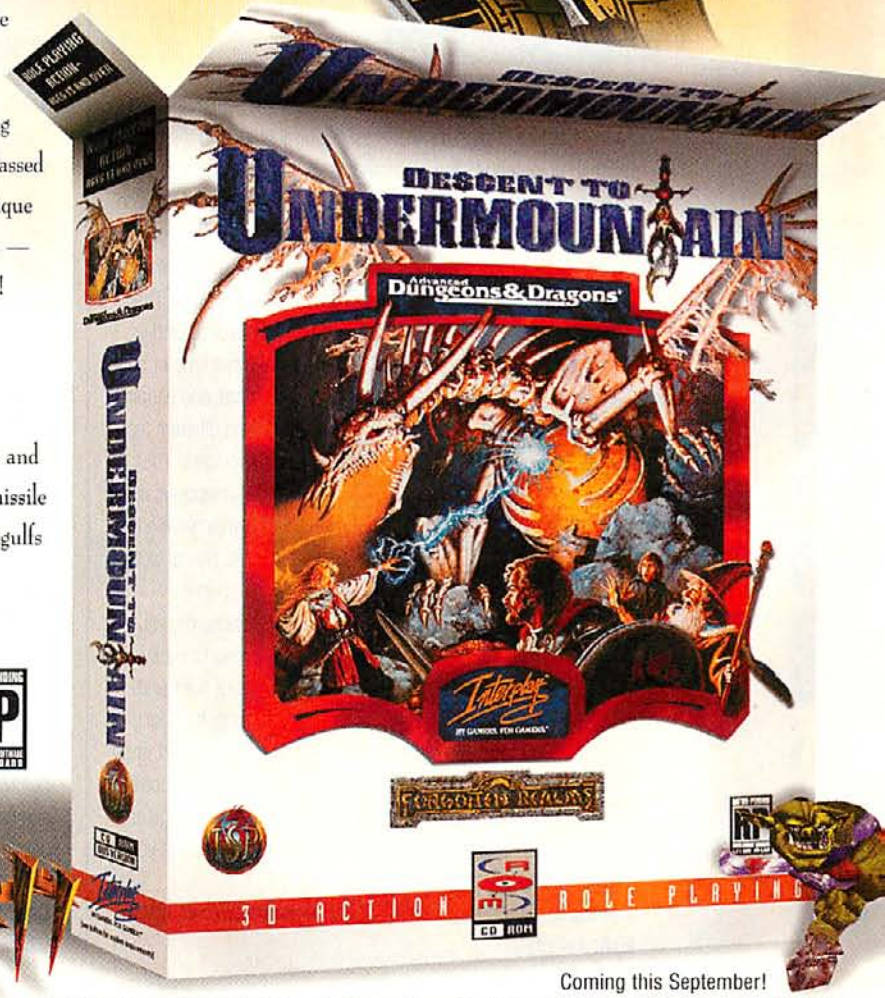
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #079

STARCRAFT



Briefing: Leading the charge in this year's overwhelmingly real-time strategy lineup is Blizzard's StarCraft, the heir to WarCraft II. Our spies report that the game is inching closer to completion and, at this stage, the campaign scenarios and play balancing are the two major issues Blizzard has yet to work on. Most of the units and special abilities of the Terrans and Zerg are finished; the Protoss, the most powerful and complicated race to play, are being implemented last.

Blizzard has decided on a style of resource management. Players will mine one resource, but will then be able to refine that mineral and create a second resource. However, when raw resources are refined at the factory (our word, not Blizzard's), the refined materials will automatically appear around your factory as they are finished. This will make for interesting resource wars, since you, or the AI, will be free to invade enemy territories and steal their refined resources, which will, of course, be more valuable than the raw variety.

Blizzard is also making the interface more intuitive. Now, context-sensitive help will be available for every building option. If you move your cursor over a research lab, for instance, a little help window will pop up at your cursor listing the prerequisite buildings.

The cloaking, improved fog of war, lighting, translucencies, and other visual effects look even better than when we last snuck a peek at this game. For a more in-depth look at StarCraft, and more information on its innovations in gameplay, see our May '97 *CGW* cover story.

Contact: Blizzard Entertainment, (800) 953-SNOW, **www.blizzard.com**
ETA: October '97

AGE OF EMPIRES

Briefing: Among the real-time juggernauts this year, Microsoft's Age of Empires is perhaps the most sophisticated, and the one most likely to seduce the turn-based lovers of Civilization and Master of Orion. Co-designed by Bruce Shelley (who was the co-creator of Civ), Age of Empires resembles an abbreviated, real-time version of Civilization. You can play as one of twelve ancient civilizations, from the Minoans to the Shang Chinese dynasty. The game stretches through four ages—Stone, Tool, Bronze, and Iron—you advance by building a certain number and type of buildings and acquiring different technologies. The gameplay is much more diverse than the typical tactical real-time wargame; you have to explore your surroundings, hunt for game, harvest food, research technologies, build cities, and wage war against your opponents. In short, it's a fun game that combines the depth of a turn-based 4X game and the adrenaline and multiplayer advantages of real-time. Next month, we'll bring you a full sneak preview of Age of Empires.



Contact: Microsoft, (206) 882-8080, **www.microsoft.com**
ETA: Fall '97

DARK REIGN

Briefing: Activision leaps into real-time strategy this fall with Dark Reign, an ambitious title that hopes to challenge Blizzard's StarCraft for the real-time crown. Combat will be more realistic than in the previous generations' real-time games, with terrain effects governing to hit percentages, damage, and firing rates. Now, units on higher ground will have superior attack bonuses, while troops ambushed at the bottom of a ravine will be at a tactical disadvantage. The terrain features will also make for more interesting map designs, as you can place bases on plateaus restricted to all but air units, meaning that an offensive to take this base could be done only by airlifting ground units, a costly endeavor indeed. Dark Reign's other innovations include customizable AI and behaviors, so you can tell troops when to retreat and how far to pursue fleeing units. Add Internet play over Activision's new, free online-gaming service and multiplayer options like resource trading, and you have a real-time force that will demand attention.



Contact: Activision, (310) 255-2000, **www.activision.com**
ETA: September '97

POPULOUS III

Briefing: POPULOUS: THE THIRD COMING is the second follow-up to POPULOUS, the god game that launched Bullfrog into gaming stardom. The original POPULOUS gave you the powers of a god, which allowed you to create and shape a world, and also to control both the population and nature of that world. In THE THIRD COMING, you are again on a quest to conquer and shape worlds, but this time, you can do so from a personal level, viewing things from only a short distance above the ground, or from an omniscient level, viewing the entire globe on your screen. You are also represented in the game as the Shaman. Through him, you recruit the wild men living about the worlds, train them into useful minions, research tech, and build structures. The game will have multiplayer capability, so you and friends can hurl civilizations of wild men and spells of destruction at each other. Coupled with a steady stream of worlds to conquer, POPULOUS: THE THIRD COMING should provide endless fun for controlling strategy gamers.



Contact: EA/Bullfrog, (800) 245-4525, **www.bullfrog.com**
ETA: Fall '97

SIMCITY 3000

Briefing: SIMCITY is one of the grandfathers of the strategy genre, and is no less influential and important a work than CIVILIZATION. It had not only the depth to appeal to hard-core gamers, but also the fun and ease of use to seduce nongamers. Now, Maxis is set to deliver a sequel, one that hopefully will restore the fun and easy play, as well as add new twists to the gameplay. SIMCITY 3000 isn't set in the future; the title simply indicates that it is third in the SIMCITY line.

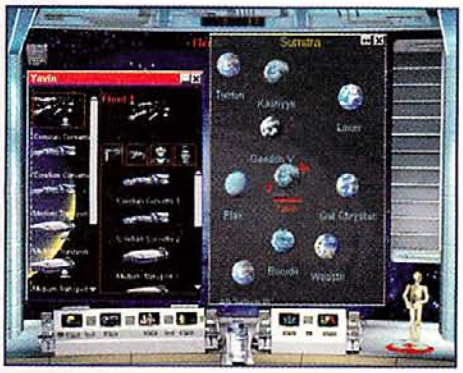


The game will be 3D, with improved graphics and a host of new buildings. What is particularly innovative is that you can now walk the streets of your city and query your citizens on the city's status, asking for feedback on the crime, pollution, or transportation situation. SIMCITY 3000 will also allow you to micromanage individual buildings. There are even more new features—including one that lets you design your own buildings and disasters—which we'll cover in an upcoming preview.

Contact: Maxis, (800) 33-MAXIS, **www.maxis.com**
ETA: Fourth Quarter '97

REBELLION

Briefing: While previous *Star Wars* games put you in the role of a participant in the epic conflict between Empire and Alliance, REBELLION gives you full control of the conflict. It is much broader in scope than all the other real-time games, including AGE OF EMPIRES, as you rule an entire half of a galaxy, controlling all aspects of its management, from diplomatic envoys to space exploration to ship and building production to tactical command. The goal, of course, is to bring victory to your side: You'll either crush the Rebellion or free the galaxy. You can achieve that through violence—which is played out in full-3D tactical space battles—or diplomacy. Sending Princess Leia to a planet on a mission of peace might work just as well as sending in Admiral Thrawn's star destroyers. The victory conditions are unique: You have to capture key enemy leaders *and* destroy their base of operations. There will be an emphasis on characters, who can influence diplomatic, scientific, and tactical endeavors, and multiplayer support. Read our January '97 cover story for a full preview.



Contact: LucasArts, (800) 985-8227, **www.lucasarts.com**
ETA: Fall '97

MYTH: THE FALLEN LORDS

Briefing: While some games like AGE OF EMPIRES are adding political and economic aspects to their tactical engines, MYTH is taking the opposite tack and abandoning all resource management in order to have a full tactical wargame. That isn't to say that the new game isn't as sophisticated, it's just a different direction, as complex in its tactical gameplay as AGE OF EMPIRES is in its economic gameplay. As a warrior on the side of the Light, you have to battle through intelligently crafted and dynamic scenarios as you battle the undead legions of the Fallen Lords. In each scenario you'll be bequeathed a set number of units, and depending on your performance in the campaign, that number could grow or dwindle. MYTH's engine is technically impressive, fully 3D, and interactive. Dwarven explosives will warp the terrain, and objects will persist in the terrain (so you can leave a dwarven bomb lying on the ground and set it off later in the game). Read this month's MYTH preview for more information.



Contact: Bungie, (312) 563-6200, **www.bungie.com**
ETA: Fourth Quarter '97

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY



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anymore," said Jack.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #**104**

WARLORDS III: REIGN OF HEROES

Briefing: Before the advent of HEROES and WARCRAFT, the WARLORDS series was the most successful fantasy strategy franchise in the industry. After a two-year hiatus, it's coming back to try to reclaim the crown. WARLORDS III is a turn-based wargame. The emphasis isn't on resource management or discovery so much as it is on combat. You command armies of mythical creatures, such as dragons and minotaurs, hurling them at your opponents' holdings in an attempt to conquer the world. To lead your troops, you can find and hire heroes who command amazing spells and special abilities. There is a bit of role-playing in WARLORDS III as well; your heroes will grow in experience and ability and be free to embark on personal quests. WARLORDS III will offer simultaneous turns for multiplay, with support for email, modem, LAN, and Internet play. Red Orb will also offer a free matching service, called Red Orb Zone, for finding available WARLORDS III games. For more information, read our June sneak preview.



Contact: Red Orb Entertainment, (800) 548-1798, **www.redorb.com**
ETA: Fall '97

MECHCOMMANDER

Briefing: FASA's BATTLETECH universe is rich with story and depth, and MicroProse is hoping to leverage that into a real-time strategy game. MECHCOMMANDER puts you in command of a 12-Mech unit, as you battle enemy Mechs and Elementals in a branching campaign to take Port Arthur from the Smoke Jaguar Clan. Your troops will gain experience as you advance through the scenarios, moving from cadets to Mechwarriors. The conditions of your Mechs, vehicles, and troops will also carry over into successive scenarios in the campaign. The campaign will have branching missions, which when coupled with the carryover of troops and experience, create an evolving and dynamic campaign that has been lacking in strategy games. Like the gameplay in JAGGED ALLIANCE, your individual Mechwarriors will have their own skills, which will improve in tandem with experience. In the campaign, you'll manage supplies and resources, as well as outfit your Mechs and command them in battle. MECHCOMMANDER will have multiplayer support over LAN and modem.



Contact: MicroProse, (800) 695-GAME, **www.microprose.com**
ETA: First half '98

WARHAMMER: DARK OMEN

Briefing: The original WARHAMMER, SHADOW OF THE HORNED RAT, was a real-time fantasy strategy game from Mindscape that had cool role-playing elements and a true 3D engine, but suffered from slow speed, interface problems, and the occasional bug. SSI is overseeing the sequel, DARK OMEN, and the crew at SSI is determined to iron out those mistakes. DARK OMEN sports a gorgeously updated 3D engine with faster frame rate, more detail, and 3D card support. The engine also allows for a free camera with rotate and zoom options. Plus, the interface has been simplified, making commands only one or two clicks away. The best feature of the first WARHAMMER, the role-playing aspect, is just as strong in DARK OMEN, with more characters and units, more magic, and more items. The original's branching missions, which gave players a limited sense of control over their own destinies, is also in DARK OMEN. WARHAMMER's lack of multiplayer support is also being addressed with head-to-head modem, serial, and LAN play.



Contact: SSI, (800) 234-3088, **www.ssionline.com**
ETA: Winter '97–'98

IMPERIALISM

Briefing: Perhaps the most ambitious of all the strategy games this fall is SSI's turn-based IMPERIALISM. In it, you must conquer the world through military, economic, or diplomatic means. As one of more than a dozen major and minor powers in a fictitious 19th-century world, you control every cog of your national machine. There are armies to command and civilian workers to order about. These you use to build your nation's infrastructure, which provides you with the necessary buildings and farms to establish economic and scientific supremacy. There are a number of diplomatic options to carry out with respect to your neighbors, including trade agreements, alliances, and non-aggression treaties. Commerce is a big part of this game, and as this is a simulation of a global economy, every nation will have needs (which can be met by importing goods) and excesses (which can be exported for profit). With strong AI and multiplayer support, IMPERIALISM will provide an excellent lesson in what it means to exploit a world.



Contact: SSI, (800) 234-3088, **www.ssionline.com**
ETA: Winter '97–'98

"The Trailer Park Won't Be The Same"

Computer Gaming World

"It's A Heck Of A Hayride"
- Gamespot

"One Of The Most Hysterical Games In Years"
- Online Games Review

"The Funniest Game We've Played This Year Y'all"
- Happy Puppy

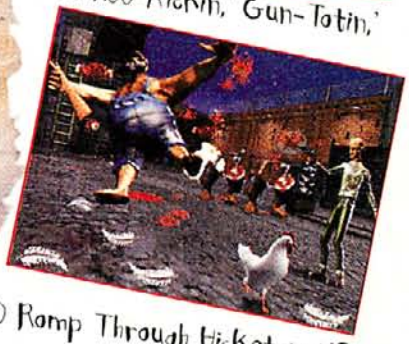
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #122

GUARDIANS: AGENTS OF JUSTICE



Briefing: Our agents have discovered that SimTex, the developers behind such hits as MASTER OF MAGIC and MASTER OF ORION, are busy at work on GUARDIANS: AGENTS OF JUSTICE, a turn-based strategy game that puts you in command of a team of superheroes. Unlike its MASTER series, SimTex's GUARDIANS is small in scope. You choose from among 14 heroes (or design your own) to form a band of heroes who then must move and battle through randomly generated isometric maps. Your heroes must explore cities, destroy terrain, and battle supervillains. The look is akin to X-COM, and is a change from the galactic proportions of previous SimTex games. The game's best feature is the more than 80 superpowers that can be combined and altered to create a variety of unique heroes. GUARDIANS will have multiplayer support for play over modem, LAN, or Internet.

Contact: MicroProse, (800) 695-GAME, **www.microprose.com**

ETA: Winter '97–'98

PAX IMPERIA: EMINENT DOMAIN



Briefing: After being dumped by Blizzard, PAX IMPERIA 2 found a new home and a new name with THQ, which has turned this game into a compelling, real-time space strategy epic. The gameplay is in the same vein as MASTER OF ORION. As part of a budding galactic civilization, you must explore the galaxy, expand your empire, exterminate your rivals, and exploit new technologies. You'll start with one planet and then, as you research technologies, upgrade your ships and colonization abilities until you can strike out into the stars and settle more planets. Once you meet alien races, you'll be able to negotiate with them, attack them in a separate real-time tactical setting, or engage in espionage to undermine their holdings and steal their tech. In a season when epic space games are lacking, PAX IMPERIA could attract the MOO crowd.

Contact: THQ, (818) 591-1310, **www.thq.com**

ETA: Fall '97

TOTAL ANNIHILATION



Briefing: It's easy to get jaded when developers start describing their real-time strategy game as the second coming of the genre, but TOTAL ANNIHILATION certainly has much to recommend it. The most obvious innovation is the 3D terrain, which translates into more realistic combat. Line of sight now becomes an issue—elevation heavily influences attack factors, and terrain can be used as obstacles. Per the game's attention to detail, when a tank moves up a steep incline, you'll see it struggle up the cliff, inching up slowly and then cresting the top before returning to a faster speed. TOTAL ANNIHILATION will offer dozens of single-player scenarios, in which you'll command more than a hundred possible units. GT Interactive also hopes to make new units available weekly to keep the game interesting. With the requisite multiplayer support in tow, TOTAL ANNIHILATION stands a very good chance of living up to its hype.

Contact: GT Interactive, (212) 726-6500, **www.gtinteractive.com**

ETA: September '97

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

MicroProse's third X-COM game, **X-COM APOCALYPSE**, reduces the scale and now encompasses Earth's last megacity, rather than the entire planet. Aliens are now infiltrating corporations, and you'll have to root them out and battle them in classic turn-based X-COM fashion or in a new real-time mode.



X-COM APOCALYPSE

CONQUEST EARTH is one of the more visually impressive real-time games, with 16-bit color and picture-in-picture movies that run while you play. The two sides—human and Martian—have different abilities and units, and even different interfaces. Action fans will be happy to know that you can control individual units in arcade fashion.

While we wait for Civ III, MicroProse is offering **ULTIMATE CIV II**, which is basically Civ II with a collection of new scenarios and an intuitive scenario editor that makes creating your own games much easier than before.

The original M.A.X. was a turn-based game with great depth and a simultaneous turns option for faster multiplay. **M.A.X. 2** now adds a real-time option, and has curtailed a bit of the depth to make the game easier to digest and more workable in real-time. Look for it this fall.

OUTPOST 2 is slated for arrival later this year, and it is (thankfully) nothing like the original. It's now real-time strategy, as you attempt to establish your colony on a hostile planet occupied by an enemy outpost.

DUNGEON KEEPER, Bullfrog's real-time fantasy strategy game, should be out by the time you read this, offering you the chance to play the evil dungeon master who must ward off intrusive do-gooders intent on stealing your loot.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #253

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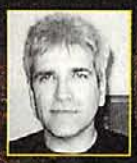
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Charlie Kibler
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Jim Dunnigan
Panzerblitz®
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Dana Lombardy
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Richard Berg
Terrible Swift Sword®, Great Battles of Alexander®, Blackbeard®

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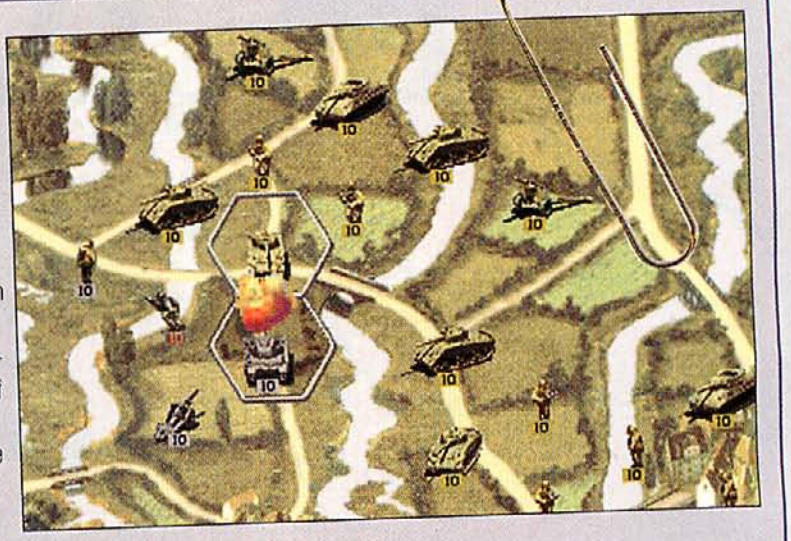
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #242

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

PANZER GENERAL II



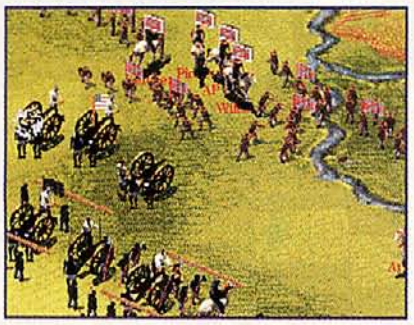
Briefing: I evaded the alarms, expertly picked the multiple locks, and dosed the guard's coffee with a sleeping aid of my own concoction. I then quietly opened the dossier, read it, and let out a long, low whistle. Our operatives had already warned us of the improved AI and the more robust campaigns—including mini-campaigns from the Allied side—but HQ had dealt adequately with those factors. The breathtaking graphics, which are attained without any compromise of the elegant interface, are more likely to overwhelm our wargaming chums back home.

As I delved farther into the robust combat system, I noticed several improvements: ranged fire for heavy hardware; the elimination of strategic bombers; and overhauled ambushes and airfield rules. Yet, at its core, the game was still the PANZER GENERAL we had been hypnotized by heretofore. Shaking my head, lest I fall too deeply under the game's insidious spell, I removed the impressive array of "what-if" scenarios, that I might study them from the safety of the hard drive in my secret hideout. As I stealthily made my way out of the SSI complex, I resolved to test the interactive impulse turns and time limits, both on and off the Internet—for research purposes only, you understand. (Agents wishing to access the full declassified report should request clearance to review last month's in-depth PANZER GENERAL II feature.)

Contact: SSI, (800) 601-7529, **www.ssionline.com**
ETA: November '97

SID MEIER'S GETTYSBURG

Briefing: Our scouts inform us that this is no mere marketing bivouac. Led by none other than General Meier, EA intends to do us some real-time harm. No twitch and flex, mind you, but a serious bit of campaigning, including plausible historical alternatives. Should we whip their powerful AI, human generals shall fight us, even o'er the Internet! This is hardly the most detailed tactical simulation, yet it presses home the attack on the flank of fun, with sufficient historical flavor. We can find fault with neither the morale system nor the manner in which the combat manifests itself, seemingly as sophisticated as the customary turn-based tactics. The greatest fear is that after we master the campaigns from both sides, we'll fall prey to the randomly generated scenarios, which our foe holds in unlimited reserve. So if you will excuse us, sir, we go now to prepare for the unrelenting assault of this awe-inspiring example of martial beauty. (For a full battle plan, see last month's cover story.)



Contact: EA, (800) 245-4525, **www.ea.com**
ETA: September '97

ACHTUNG! SPITFIRE

Briefing: All right, lads—through use of Her Majesty's new technology, radar, we have spotted yet another wave of turn-based aircraft poised on the horizon. But this time, you must first intercept the opposing squadrons in an overarching real-time operational manner before moving into OVER THE REICH-style tactical combat.



Right. All pilots are reminded that these 1940-era aircraft are not as maneuverable as the planes to which anyone familiar with this system is accustomed. Thus, they will require that you master different tactics in order to survive. Furthermore, we have broken the Internet code, and may now pursue the enemy even in stormy weather areas, such as AOL. In addition to defending the homeland in the Battle of Britain, you may also fight in the skies of our French allies, or even coordinate and lead Jerry's attack. Finally, keep in mind that all we have to fear is fear itself, and possibly our pilots succumbing to fatigue—which is an element new to this simulation. Questions? No? Time for tea, then.

Contact: Avalon Hill, (800) 999-3222, **www.avalonhill.com**
ETA: August/September '97

ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Just because TalonSoft has developed its new WWII engine, don't think that the old one won't go out with a big bang. In **Battleground 8: Prelude to Waterloo**, you face the quintessential Napoleonic dilemma: How can the French forces defeat two major armies before Wellington and Blucher unite their forces? In addition to the battles of Quatre Bras and Ligny, TalonSoft plans to let would-be Bonapartes carry their results over to the campaign game of Battleground: Waterloo. If they can pull it off, the result would be the most fulfilling campaign ever for Napoleonic-era gaming.

Sierra should be putting the finishing touches on **Civil War Generals** this fall, complete with battle and map editors. Sierra wants to do for generals Grant and Sherman what the first game did for Lee. Marse Robert is still around in the sequel, with the addition of (finally!) the Seven Days' Battles.

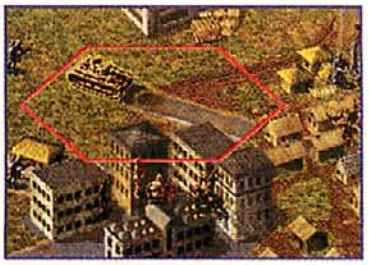
Another sequel, **Steel Panthers III**, moves to a larger scale, somewhere between the original Steel Panthers and Panzer General II. It will include new scenarios for battles from both Steel I & II, as well as new systems for artillery and air support. Don't expect this one until late fall, at the earliest.

Great Battles of Hannibal, the sequel to Alexander (see the review this issue), promises to spruce up the game engine. It will be interesting to see if Erudite Software and Interactive Magic can continue to improve the already challenging AI. This game should make its late fall shipping date, but don't expect the third game in the series, Julius Caesar, until next spring or summer.



Battleground 8: Prelude to Waterloo

EASTFRONT



Briefing: Comrade, I have escaped from the front with alarming news! The forces of TalonSoft are massing on the borders with a terrifying new engine. Da, it is beyond anything they have done before on the battlefield. I have reconnoitered their tall buildings and SVGA-graphics soldiers, and I have uncovered the hexagons underneath. But tovarisch, they are huge—enough to hold an entire Soviet rocket battalion with no degradation in graphics—complete with multiple zoom levels! And the sequence of play is so streamlined it is like the finest vodka on a cold Leningrad evening, yet it still manages to deliver a potent WWII punch. Whether climbing Mamayev Kurgayen or struggling through all the streets of Stalingrad, you may fight from platoon all the way to corps level. Never have I seen a turn-based assault quite like this one, as it strives to bring the great battles of the Eastern Front to modem, email, and Internet alike.

Contact: TalonSoft, (800) 211-6504, **www.talonsoft.com**

ETA: Fall '97

CLOSE COMBAT II



Briefing: The recon pilot asks if I need to make another pass over the target. I decline. I've been a trained observer too long to deny evidence right before my eyes. It's hard to believe, but this sequel leaves the original in an abandoned foxhole. It's more realistic, more interesting—Market-Garden rather than France '44—and it finally has a dynamic campaign, as opposed to a bunch of scenarios gerrymandered together. Line-of-sight and field-of-fire have a dramatically improved feel as opposed to the original game, and are enhanced by the new visuals for multilevel buildings. The maps of Arnhem are probably the most detailed and accurate of any game ever published, and they give the impression of being in a real city. Best of all, Close Combat II is actually a *game* this time around. If it isn't one of the most popular Internet strategy titles around, I'll swallow my stogie.

Contact: Microsoft, (206) 882-8080, **www.microsoft.com/games**

ETA: November '97

SIEGE



Briefing: Milord, I have returned from the witches' cave, where the old hag has divined the particulars of Sir-Tech's plan. It is much like the tactical combat of Lords of the Realm, complete with boiling oil with which to fricassee one's enemies. But where that game faltered upon the open fields of battle, Siege wisely restricts the conflict to the confines of the castle walls. You may build siege engines and train archers, knights, and even peasants—for, alas, someone must hold the assault ladders. The castles themselves are not strictly historical, though they are indeed inspired by great walled towns, and crafted so exquisitely as to give the most seasoned stone-mason pause. The real-time fighting moves at a stately pace—the weight of armor, we suppose—that seems ideal for Internet clashes of sword upon shield. We await yon flaming arrow, or perhaps a finely tuned catapult, with heightened expectation.

Contact: Sir-Tech Software, (315) 393-6633, **www.sir-tech.com**

ETA: Fall '97

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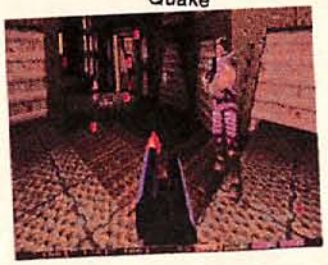
HEAT.NET is the easiest internet game network to get started playing. You can log on to HEAT.NET, get the free HEAT™ software and play. Or soon, you can go to the store and buy the retail package, which includes six months' premium membership, a HEAT CD and a month's free internet access.

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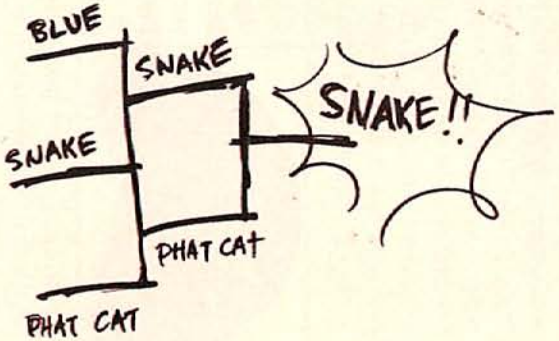
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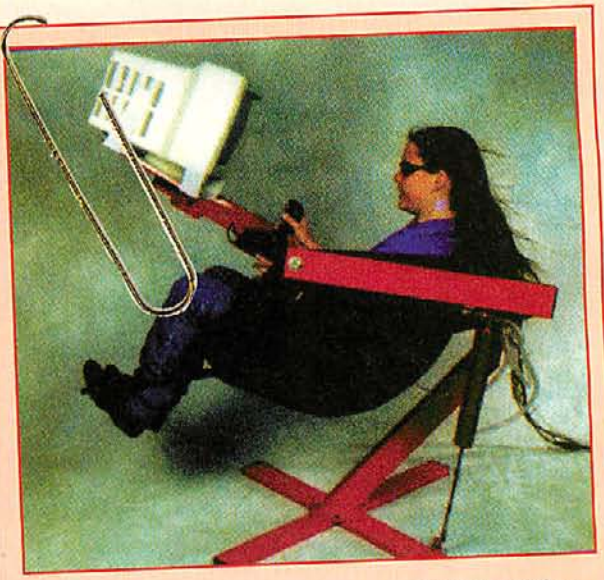
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #267

ROCK 'N' RIDE



Briefing: Though our operatives were well within the inner sanctums, we had them scout the outer perimeter to verify unconfirmed reports we'd had about a dastardly new device. Sure enough, there it was—bright red painted girders, sinister black plastic seat, with tubes leading to a hidden power source beneath the platform: the Rock 'n' Ride.

The Rock 'n' Ride is a compressed-air-operated, "full motion" seat that responds to joystick inputs. It optionally ships with an air compressor, but can use any compressor that delivers at least 2 cubic feet per minute. Although the pistons generate a slightly jerky motion, the whole thing is a hoot to play with, as it tilts you 60 degrees in any direction. You strap your monitor to a platform, which also has a swing-out joystick tray. There's also a footrest and, most importantly, an optional, gimbaled beer-can holder.

Normally, pulling back on the joystick generates a backward motion, but you can reverse the axis with a switch so that pushing forward on the stick pushes the seat back—just the thing for driving titles. And while the Rock 'n' Ride's not dirt-cheap, it does come in at a fairly reasonable $800.

Rock 'n' Ride does have some limitations; the monitor rack only supports up to 30 pounds—definitely a problem for 17-inch monitors. There's currently no second joystick rack for a throttle, although the footrest for the final product may support pedals. If you're yearning for a true full-motion experience with your sim, arcade flight game, or driving game, check this out. Just don't forget the Dramamine.

Contact: Rock 'n' Ride, (888) 431-9893, **www.rocknride.com**
ETA: Available Now

THRUSTMASTER RAGE 3D

Briefing: We've uncovered a plot by Thrustmaster to deliver a digital gamepad that's comfortable for large-handed gamers (and you know what that means: big gloves). This new controller, dubbed the Rage 3D, uses a "lizard-eye" thumb pad in lieu of the more traditional thumb dish. The result is much easier operation and reduced fatigue from prolonged usage. Though the Rage 3D is a digital gamepad, it offers an analog setting as well. The analog setting provides better granularity for minute movement, but is somewhat less responsive to drastic movement, whereas the digital setting shortens the thumb pad's overall throw, and provides much quicker response.

Rage 3D also makes use of Thrustmaster's new Direct-Connect technology, which assigns controllers an ID, so when that controller is connected, the driver will know which control panel to invoke. DirectConnect driver will also allow you to choose which controller (or controllers) you want to be active (gamepad, stick/pedals/throttle), and also allows you to configure them. DirectConnect devices will need little or no calibration. Rage 3D should be shipping now.



Contact: Thrustmaster, (503) 615-3200, **www.thrustmaster.com**
ETA: Available Now

SAITEK PC DASH

Briefing: Slipping unnoticed into the foyer, and using the cardkey he'd removed from the unconscious guard, our agent was able to uncover details on UK manufacturer Saitek's new PC-Dash. And from what he found out, it looks like the Brits have done a nice job on this one.

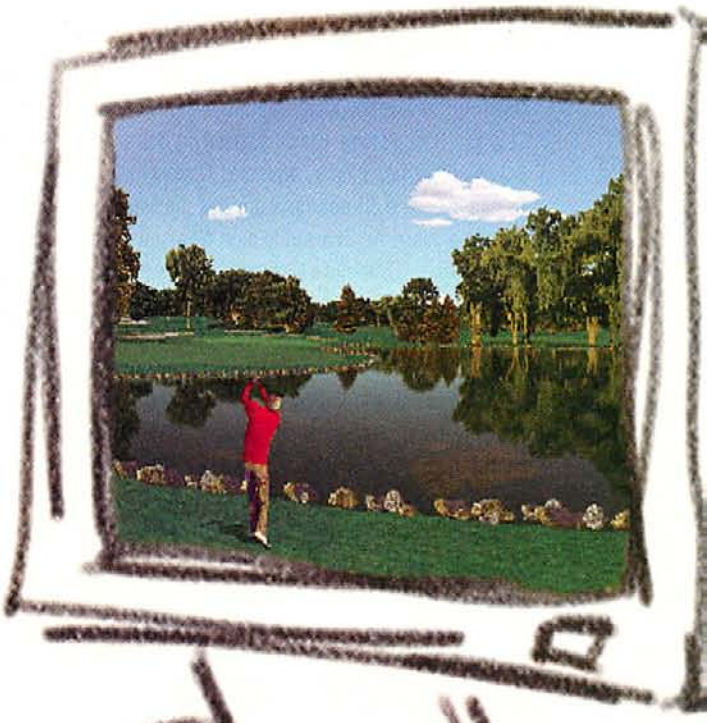


This touchpad device can partially replace keyboards. Unlike Quickshot's Masterpilot, a similar product, PC-Dash is a programmable device that can either be programmed via direct download from a Windows-based utility or through a built-in bar-code reader that can be printed out and saved with the software utility. You can design your own templates and even assign graphics or text to the template buttons. Templates designed by Saitek can be downloaded from their Web site, and a number of game companies will be including templates in their boxes. The only thing that seems to be lacking now is a support to allow the PC-Dash to stand vertically, but Saitek is studying that possibility.

Contact: Saitek, (310) 212-5412, **www.saitek.com**
ETA: Available Now

Links LS
1998 Edition

THE ART *and the* SCIENCE of GOLF

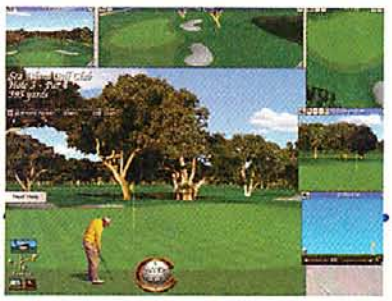


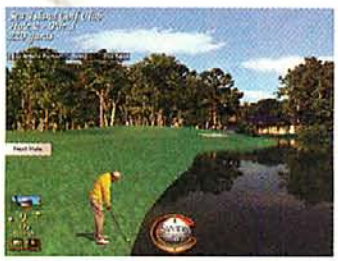
Introducing the Links LS 1998 Edition. The forces of art and science have combined to produce a golf experience like never before. This new version of the Codie Award winning golf simulation is packed with over 25 new features! Here's just a few:



Brace yourself for lightening-fast redraws, main view in a window capability, and up to 8 additional "smart" camera views.

Notice the new waving flags, birds, airplanes and other background animations with up to 8 of your friends over expanded internet play!





Our course designers have given even more attention to detail including new water reflections, improved textures and enhanced sky backgrounds.

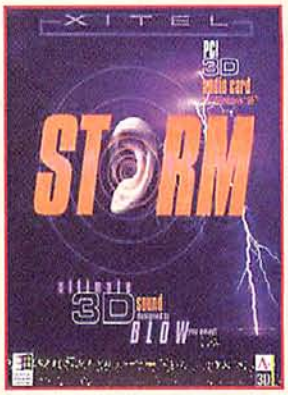


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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #248

XITEL STORM



Briefing: Xitel is sounding off in 3D with their new Storm PCI sound card, which is based on Oak's OTI-611 chip. This new chip incorporates Aureal Semiconductor's 3D positional audio technology, the most impressive we've heard to date. Now you're probably thinking, "Diamond's Monster Sound, which also uses Aureal's technology, has been shipping for several months now, so what's the big deal?" The big deal is that Xitel's Storm will hit the streets for about $100, half the price of the Monster Sound. To pull this off, Xitel has made some trade-offs: Storm has no Sound-Blaster support (it leaves those chores to an already-installed Sound Blaster), doesn't come standard with a hardware wavetable synthesizer, and ships with no bundled titles. Still, Storm does bring convincing positional 3D-audio technology at a very affordable price that will round out any gamer's audio sub-system.

Contact: Xitel, (512) 331-5544, **www.xitel.com**

ETA: Available Now

GATEWAY DESTINATION



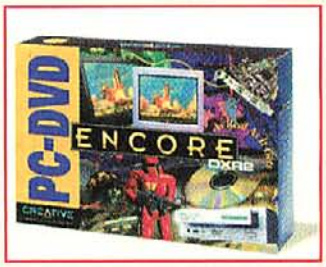
Briefing: Our mole (disguised as a prairie dog) infiltrated Gateway 2000's encampment to reveal that Gateway's latest Destination Big Screen PC/TV will now be equipped with a Toshiba DVD-ROM, which is a logical evolution for this living-room home subversion, er...entertainment device. Gateway is using Chromatic Research's Mpact media processor as their MPEG-2 decoder, which will also decode DVD's Dolby AC-3 5-channel audio. This welcome addition of a DVD drive and decoder will allow you to get a big eyeful of DVD movie titles and play DVD game titles as they begin to ship.

For gamers, our mole reports that the Destination will soon also have a long-missing component: a 3D graphics accelerator. The transmission trailed off with some mention of stampeding mad cows closing in, and there's been no word since. So while details are currently sketchy, a 3D accelerator will comprise a very important piece of the puzzle to make the Destination more appealing for hard-core gamers.

Contact: Gateway, (800) 864-0552, **www.gw2k.com**

ETA: Available Now

CREATIVE LABS PC-DVD



Briefing: Also making waves on the DVD front is Creative Labs, with its PC-DVD upgrade kit. One thing that's kept the DVD party from really roaring has been the kits' prices, which usually ran between $500–800. Stand-alone DVD players haven't been any less expensive, coming in around $600–800. Our deep-cover man informs us that Creative has just the fix: a DVD upgrade kit for $379, which includes an MPEG-2 decoder board. This more attractive price makes the decision between upgrading to a fast CD-ROM versus DVD a good bit more interesting. And while 1997 has, so far, been wanting for DVD game titles, 1998 will have a number of DVD titles hitting store shelves. Currently in the works for release later this year is an enhanced version of Origin's WING COMMANDER IV.

Contact: Creative Labs, (408) 434-5700, **www.soundblaster.com**

ETA: Available Now

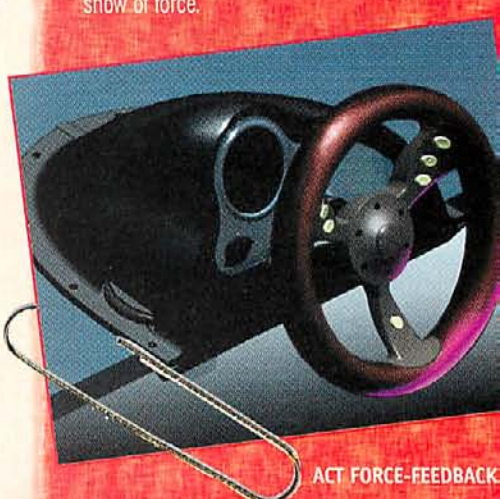
ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE

After the raid on Saitek, our people had a tough time making an escape. Everywhere they turned, they were surrounded by force feedback gear, which was practically popping out of the woodwork. Escape proved to be a challenge.

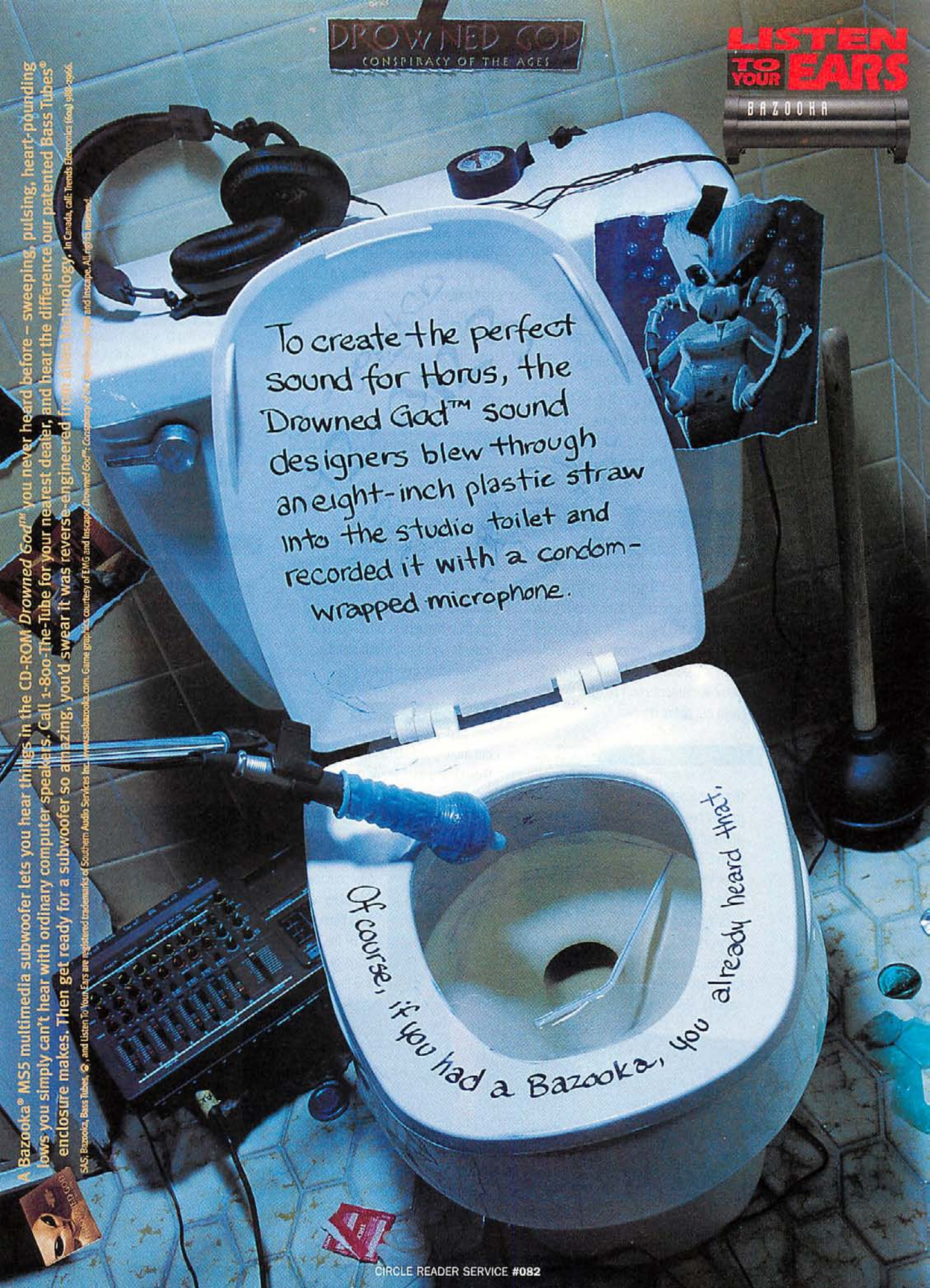
Thrustmaster, CH, SC&T, and ACT Labs were all showing force-feedback steering wheels. The Thrusty is a very early prototype, but the wheel and shifter looked much like the Formula T2. CH's wheel is very compact, with a single clamp holding the body of the wheel down. The ACT wheel looks like a miniature dashboard. It also has a cartridge slot for upgrades. If you get the PC Wheel for $99, you can add a $20 cartridge and presto—you have a PlayStation wheel. Other cartridges will be available for other platforms. The SC&T wheel wasn't as striking in its appearance, but seemed functional.

Force-feedback joysticks are in evidence, too. There is a secret prototype of the Logitech stick from Immersion Technology. Microsoft's Sidewinder Force Feedback seems to be everywhere. The good news is that Immersion's version 2.0 technology will be part of DirectX 5.0.

Finally, Cybernet has its force-feedback flight yoke. This should be just the ticket for civil aviation buffs who had been eyeing force-feedback combat sticks with envy. It's looking like 1998 will be the year force feedback makes its show of force.



ACT FORCE-FEEDBACK



CIRCLE READER SERVICE #082

10 Worst Trends at E3

1. ME TOO-ISM

We saw well over 100 impressive new titles at the E3 show. And we saw only about 10 new ideas. Too many marketing weenies see a hit game and think the best road to a hit is to copy (and try to improve upon) it. So look for the current wave of real-time games to make way for a line of TOMB RAIDER clones, before the inevitable transition to DIABLO-alikes.

2. REAL-TIME STRATEGY OVERLOAD

A corollary to the last entry. There are more than 50 games in the works that are variations on the COMMAND AND CONQUER and WARCRAFT models. Even if there are 15 real winners in the bunch, many are doomed to failure simply because gamers won't be able to pick them out of the horde.

3. THE BIMBO FACTOR

We're ecstatic to finally see some female heroes in games previously dominated by males. But the ones we've seen so far aren't going to do anything to get our wives, girlfriends, or daughters interested in gaming: No female is going to buy exploring Aztec ruins in short-shorts and a halter top. Don't these development teams realize it's possible to be sexy without being half-naked? From what we saw at E3, though, look for even more pneumatically enhanced females attempting to grab the attention of young male gamers who get their kicks from big, bouncing polygons.



HEROES OR BIMBOS? With RIANA ROUGE, DEATHTRAP DUNGEON, and TOMB RAIDER 2 on its plate, Eidos Interactive seems to be getting inspiration for its heroines from visits to strip clubs.

4. 3D-CARD CONFUSION

Developers are jumping on the 3D-card bandwagon, but they're all choosing different ways to ride. One game supports Direct3D, the next has only custom drivers for Rendition and 3Dfx cards, while the next supports OpenGL. It's as bad as the early days of sound cards, and gamers are stuck having to get their Masters in Driver-ology in order to figure out which standards are supported by their home PCs.

5. BAD WRITING

In days past, Infocom alone put out more good stories each year than the industry as a whole manages to do today. The majority of fantasy stories are AD&D clichés, most new science fiction plots would have been rejected by the pulp mags of the '30s, and flight sims keep rehashing a Russian invasion of the Ukraine. C'mon, folks, you'll spend a million on a cool 3D-engine. Ever notice how cheaply writers work?

6. HOLIDAY OVERLOAD

The industry has fixated so hard on the admittedly active holiday buying season that a disturbing majority of games are released between October and March (counting all the ones which miss Christmas and thus ship at the end of the first financial quarter). What do they expect us to do in the summer, go to the beach?

7. GRATUITOUS PHYSICS

Everyone's claiming "real physics." It's one thing when it's a flight sim or a driving game. But we're seeing such claims in space sims and even first-person shooters. What's next, Pac Man 3D?

8. HALF-ASSED ONLINE GAMES

Is ASTEROIDS really that much better a game with other players around you shooting at rocks too?

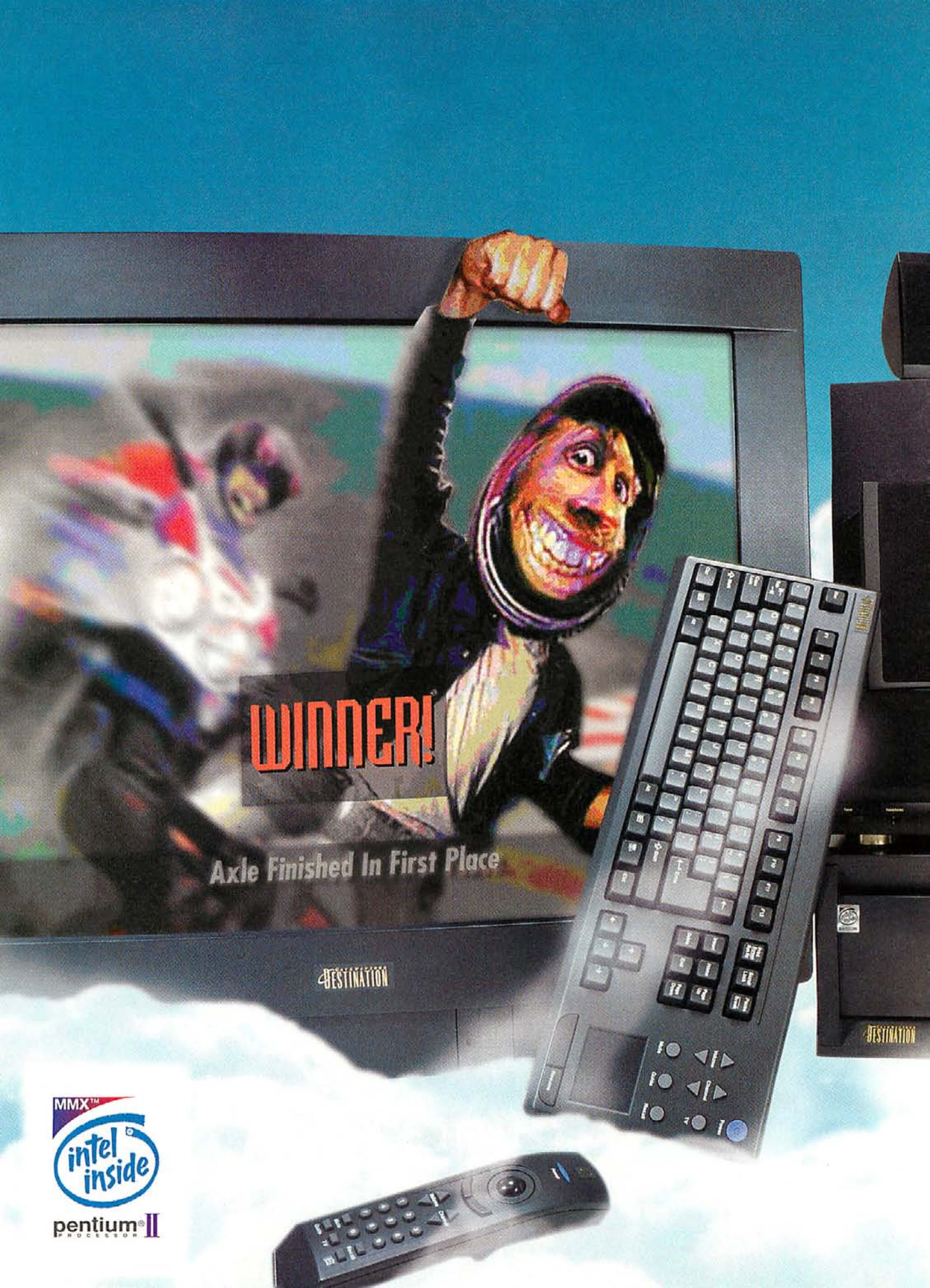
9. HUGE HARD DRIVE INSTALLS

We kept hearing 50–75MB minimum install figures for new games. Hey guys, new systems are coming with 16x and 24x CD-ROMs. At least give us the option to *try* running the game from CD.

10. BLINDLY OPTIMISTIC SHIP DATES

No matter how many ship dates they miss, developers and marketing dweebs still don't seem to be able to realistically tell how much time it takes to do a top-notch game today. Look for lots of games slated for November to be available just in time for the Easter holiday.


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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #105

Performance on Trial

Windows 95: Boon or Bust for Gamers?



It's been said that the jury's still out on Windows 95 for games. What if Windows 95 was actually put on trial for its "crimes" against gamers? How would that jury find? Here's a transcript from the gamers' trial of the century.

Prosecution: Your honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we are here today to show that running games under Windows 95 is a ludicrous idea. Performance of DOS games on Windows 95 simply doesn't pass muster. The Windows 95 versions of popular games can't keep up, and Windows 95 simply hasn't lived up to its hype as a gaming platform.

Defense: We will show today, your honor, that these charges are unfounded and baseless. Windows 95 has proven to be a boon to gamers everywhere. Game developers no longer have to write their own device drive—

Prosecution: Objection! We're not talking about game developers! We're talking about game players!

Judge: Objection sustained. Relevancy, Counselor.

Defense: Your honor, I do wish the prosecution would stick to the facts and not throw out random objections because it sounds cool on TV.

Prosecution (incensed): Very well, here are some facts. During the discovery process, we took a look at DOS games running under DOS and Windows. We examined Windows 95 versions of popular DOS titles. Let's look at them one by one.

Rowan's FLYING CORPS shipped with both a Windows 95 version and a DOS version on the same CD, and simply put, the Windows 95 version runs abysmally. We tested it on a Pentium 200, and here are the results:

FLYING CORPS, 640x480, all details turned up	Frame Rate
Windows 95 Native	5–6fps
DOS version, under DOS	9–10fps
DOS version, under Win 95	8–9fps

As you can see, the Windows 95 version doesn't hold a candle to the DOS version—even when the DOS version is running under Windows 95!

Defense: Your honor, we believe the Windows 95 version is poorly programmed, and would submit our own example: QUAKE. The defense wishes to enter into evidence our findings testing the DOS version of QUAKE, both under Windows and Windows 95, as well as the newly released WINQUAKE. Here's what we found:

TimeDemos	320x200	640x480
WINQUAKE	40.7fps	16fps
QUAKE in DOS	43.9fps	16.8fps
QUAKE in Win 95 DOS box	41.6fps	16.5fps

Please note, your honor, that although the DOS version is faster under DOS, the overall performance difference is about 10 percent, as Microsoft has always claimed, and that the differences at the higher resolution are much less. And since QUAKE is a multiplayer game, it's much easier to use under Windows 95—whether it's the DOS version or the WINQUAKE version—than to try to set up networking under DOS.

Prosecution: Setup, schmetup. The fact is, there's still a big performance hit. And hard-core gamers know how to load a few measly networking drivers. In fact, let's take a look at another popular game: EA's ATF. We set up a "blank mission" (one plane only) on a runway and checked out the frame rate. Note that we used ATFGOLD for the Windows 95 test, since Windows 95 chokes on ATF. Here, then, are the cold, stark numbers:

ATF (640x480, sky and water textures turned off)	Frame Rate
ATF (DOS)	18fps
ATF Gold (Windows 95)	13.5fps

I would submit, your honor, that the difference here is vastly greater than a mere 10 percent.

Defense: We have two issues with the prosecution's technique. First, they're stacking the deck by using only ports of DOS games. Although we couldn't capture a frame rate number from these two games, it's clear after extensive gameplay that both EARTHSIEGE 2 and X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER run very smoothly on even Pentium 100s—certainly no worse than if they had been DOS games.

Prosecution: We strenuously object to this tactic, your honor! This is merely anecdotal evidence! Can the defense offer any real numbers?

Judge: Objection sustained. Counselor, do you have any data?

Defense (vexed): Yes, you ignorant

> "What if Windows 95 was actually put on trial for its 'crimes' against gamers?"

twit—er, sorry, your honor, I meant the prosecutor, not you. At any rate, back to the whole DOS games under Windows 95 issue, we would like to offer into evidence DESCENT II:

DESCENT II (DOS game only) Frame Rate at Start of Level 1	
MS-DOS Mode	32fps
From Windows 95	30fps

As you can see, the difference is trivial. If you couple that with the ease of setup—DESCENT II uses AutoRun—then games become much more accessible. We feel—

Prosecution (indignantly): Your honor, the defense has raised a very salient issue. We've received numerous complaints of Windows 95 game installations rendering systems completely unusable unless the disk is formatted and Windows 95 is reinstalled. Games like the ill-fated WING COMMANDER KILRATHI PACK would install DirectX without first asking the user.

Defense (coldly): And to think that the prosecution excoriated us for using anecdotal evidence. We acknowledge that some Windows 95 games have been, shall we say, poor citizens. However, things have improved greatly. The latest versions of DirectX carefully check version numbers before installing, and if it thinks DirectX needs to be installed, it asks first.

Prosecution: Your honor, the setup issue is a red herring. In fact, setup for DOS games was improving when this Windows 95 juggernaut rolled into town. The performance of Windows 95 games is highly dependent upon the graphics card and the card drivers. In fact, SVGA-graphics performance under DOS was very consistent—

Defense: Objection! SVGA-graphics performance under DOS is very dependent on the installed graphics chip, VESA implementations, and other issues. It was at least as confusing as dealing with the graphics cards under Windows 95—perhaps more so. Consider also the new generation of Windows 95 games—3D titles that will take advantage of 3D accelerators.

Judge: Objection sustained. Seems like six of one, half-dozen of the other, Mr. Prosecutor.

Let's move this debate along. Present your closing arguments.

Prosecution: Windows 95 has proven to be the bane of gamers everywhere. Poor performance of DOS games and the inability to even run some DOS games have caused great frustration and headaches for users everywhere. We submit that game developers should return to the well-known principles of DOS game development and ignore the dictates of the Redmond rabble-rousers. Given that some Windows 95 games perform only half as well as their DOS versions, should gamers have to keep paying for faster and faster hardware, just to try to keep up with the ravenous demands of Windows 95? We think not. We rest our case.

Defense: As usual, the prosecution tries to pass off innuendo and rumor as fact.

Do game developers really want to return to the arcane intricacies of DOS gaming? Do they really want to spend time developing drivers for multiple pieces of hardware? We think not.

And given the increasing popularity of multiplayer games, we would also submit that Windows 95 is far simpler to configure than DOS. Lastly, Windows 95 games are embracing new technologies like 3D-positional audio and 3D-accelerated, high-resolution graphics; these are features that DOS games aren't willing to address. As game developers improve their understanding of Windows 95 game development, the games will only get better. The defense rests.

YOU BE THE JUDGE

The case now goes over to the most demanding jury of all: gamers. Ultimately, you have to decide whether Windows 95 games are better than their DOS counterparts. Speaking as one juror/gamer, I've evolved my system to the point where I rarely boot to the DOS prompt anymore, even for DOS games. And almost all of the hot titles currently in the works are Windows 95 titles.

I do believe game developers and Microsoft are trying to atone for the sins of the recent past. Some new games, like X-WING VS. TIE FIGHTER, install easily and perform pretty well. In the end, though, you must decide whether this brave new world is for you. Change is never easy, but with titles such as JEDI KNIGHT, SEMPER FI, IF-22, and others coming down the pike, I know that it's the titles that count. If they're good games and good PC "citizens," then all I care about is how they immerse me. Let me know what your experiences are and how you, the jury, find.

Return your verdict to: lcase@pacbell.net.

LAB NOTES

TWEAKBIOS

The true measure of a PC hardware geek is whether or not they try to mess around with their BIOS. (Okay, so I do it a bit, too.)

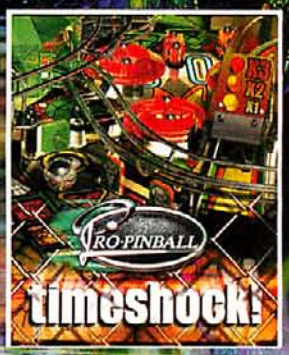
However, many BIOSes are "dumbed down" and don't allow much tweaking at all. To the rescue of geeks everywhere rides Miro Wikgren, who has written a nifty little BIOS tweaking utility appropriately named TweakBIOS. Download a shareware version from Wikgren's Web site at **www.helsinke.fi/~wikgren/tweakbios/**.

EZBUILD FOR WINDOWS 95

If you're the proud owner of one of Thrustmaster's programmable sticks, you're also probably one of the vast majority who simply download existing templates. These templates are helpful, especially because programming Thrustmaster's sticks is an arcane art at best. Marlo Casabar thought so too, so he wrote EZBuild for Windows 95, a shareware front-end for programming Thrustmaster gear. It's especially handy for the more complex setups, like the FLCS/TQS combo. To run EZBuild, you'll also need the latest set of Thrustmaster files. Get a copy of EZBuild on the Web at **heml.passagen.se/kallesel/**. Make sure you send Marlo the shareware fee.

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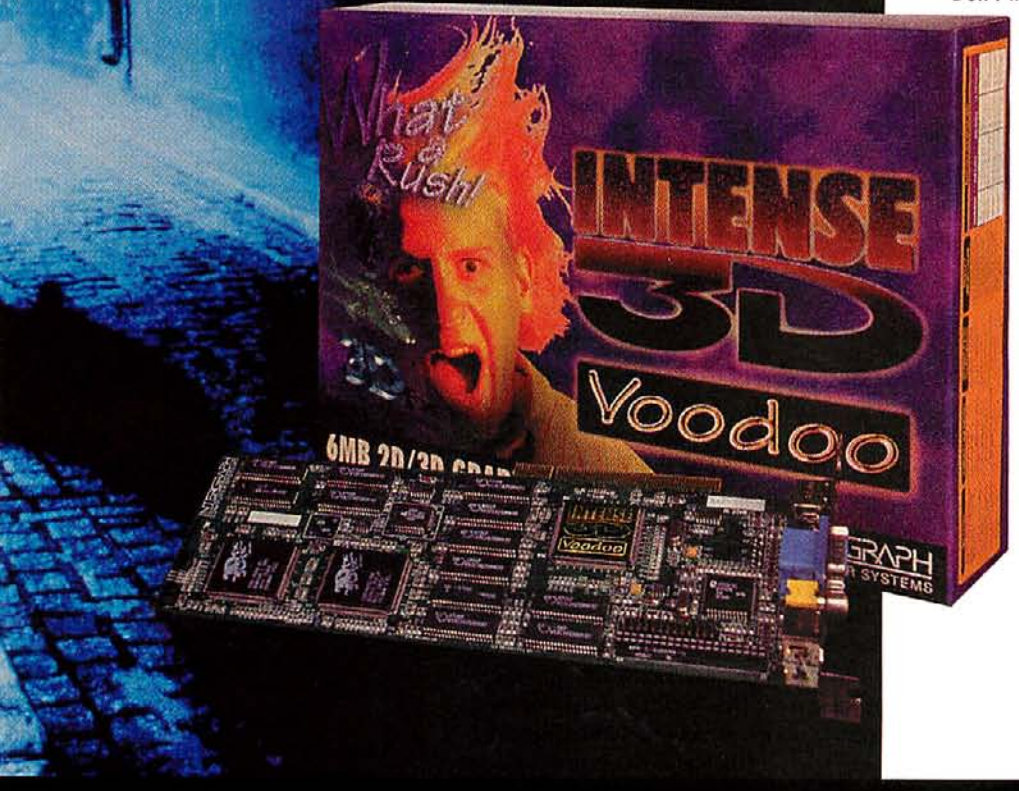


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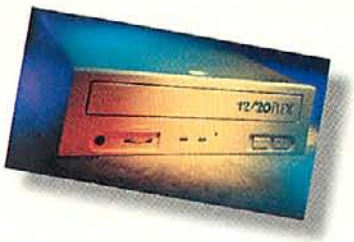
CIRCLE READER SERVICE #**073**

★★★★★ REVIEW • PLEXTOR 12/20 CD-ROM DRIVE

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CG CHOICE

by Loyd Case



The effort to increase the speed in CD-ROM drives has resulted in a shift from CLV (constant linear velocity) to CAV (constant angular velocity) CD-ROM drives. CLV drives move data under the head at the same rate and constantly change rotational speed, whereas CAV drives keep rotational speed constant, producing a variable data rate, depending on the location of the head.

Plextor has taken a slightly different tack with its new drive. The 12/20 is a partial CAV drive, meaning it changes speed, but only in discrete intervals on the disk. In other words, it shifts gears depending on whether the head is closer to the inside or the outside of the disk. The "12/20" refers to the minimum and maximum speeds (relative to a single-speed drive). This is a refreshing bit of honesty in the midst of all the marketing hype about high-speed CD-ROM drives.

Like all Plextor drives, the 12/20 is a SCSI device, but unlike earlier Plextor products, it's offered only in a tray version. The 12/20's street price is lower than that of earlier Plextor products—around $225 (sans SCSI host adapter).

Looking at the numbers, this is one fast drive—it easily outpaces some "24x" drives, and it comes in with a WinBench 97 CD WinMark of 1400 on a Micron Millenia 166MHz Pentium system. Most EIDE 24x drives come in at roughly 1200–1250 WinMarks. Sequential throughput seems better, too, probably due to the large 512KB buffer. One other nice feature is its support for reading the new CD/RW (erasable) CDs.

Given the combination of lower price and barn-burning performance, this is a terrific CD-ROM drive if you want a SCSI device. Given that DVD drives will probably come of age in the next 12–18 months, the 12/20 may be the last CD-ROM drive you'll ever need.

Price: $225 (street price w/o SCSI host adapter)
Manufacturer: Plextor
(800) 886-3935
www.plextor.com
Reader Service #: 316

APPEAL: Those wanting the ultimate in CD-ROM drive performance.

PROS: Fast, fast, fast; reads CD/RW.

CONS: Requires SCSI host adapter; still more expensive than EIDE offerings.

CG RATED

★★★★☆ REVIEW • QUANTUM FIREBALL ST 3.2

More Storage in Less Space

by Loyd Case



The new Fireball ST represents the leading edge of EIDE hard drives, and has all the spiffy features you'd expect in modern hard disks: magneto-resistive (MR) heads (which can read more tightly packed, smaller tracks) and Partial Read Maximum Likelihood (PRML) read channels (for predicted read-ahead caching). Because its MR heads allow for reduced individual track size, it can pack 3.2GB into a 1-inch-high form factor. Most importantly, it supports the new Ultra DMA/33 (a.k.a. Ultra ATA) EIDE standard. Ultra DMA/33 doubles the theoretical maximum throughput of EIDE from 16.6MB/sec to 33MB/sec.

I slipped the drive into a Pentium MMX system with the new Intel 430TX chipset, which supports Ultra DMA/33. Using WinBench 97, the drive posted a score of 966 with Ultra DMA/33 disabled, and just shy of 1,000 with Ultra DMA/33 enabled. This seems like a fairly minor speed improvement, but the overall feel of the drive was certainly different. I'm used to running systems with high-speed, wide SCSI drives and, unlike other EIDE systems I've used, this one seemed quick and responsive.

The Fireball ST can be found as low as $279 mail order—certainly not a bad price for a leading-edge, high-capacity EIDE hard drive. Although the Fireball ST will run just fine in a standard EIDE-based system, you'll need either a 430TX-based system or a PCI-based Ultra DMA/33 drive controller. But if you've outgrown your current drive, or want better performance from an EIDE drive, take a good look at the Fireball ST.

Price: $279 (approximate street)
Manufacturer: Quantum Corp.
(408) 894-4000
www.quantum.com
Reader Service #: 333

APPEAL: Those wanting fast, cost-effective hard-drive performance.

PROS: Small; fast; relatively easy to install.

CONS: Needs a new motherboard or a new disk controller for maximum performance.

CG RATED


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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #061

★★½☆☆ **REVIEW • THRUSTMASTER TOP GUN USB JOYSTICK**

Highway to the USB Zone



by Dave Salvator

Despite great advances in processors, graphics, audio, and other architectural improvements, PCs still have a frequently used wart: the 15-pin joystick port. Gamers who want to use multiple controllers have had to buy a switch-box or invest in Advanced Gravis' GRiP. Then there are calibration headaches and thermal drift, owing to sound card vendors' use of cheap A/D converters. Digital controllers have solved this problem somewhat, but you can still use only one at a time. The Universal Serial Bus (USB) will soon go a long way to solving this problem, allowing digital controllers to be attached/detached sans reboot, and with a hub, support four or more controllers simultaneously. Thrustmaster's first USB offering is its Top Gun stick, an entry-level stick which turns out be a solid Win-95 performer.

The first remarkable thing with this Top Gun is how simple the installation is, though you'll need to have a USB-aware BIOS and Microsoft's USB patch for Windows 95 before getting started. Because USB devices are hot-swappable, Windows 95 immediately finds the Top Gun when you plug it in, and prompts you for a driver. One floppy later, Top Gun was ready to roll. Because Top Gun is a digital stick, it holds calibration very well, with no noticeable drift.

We took the Top Gun for a spin through USNF '97 and INTERSTATE '76, and in both titles, it was a very able performer, delivering Thrustmaster's usual taut feel. Unfortunately, Top Gun USB can't be used with a separate throttle or pedals, so serious flight jockeys may want to look elsewhere. Turning to DOS, the driver we used didn't yet have support for DOS titles in a Windows 95 box. At press time, Thrustmaster stated this support would be in an updated driver. USB's serious downside is that not all USB implementations will have native DOS support, and since not all DOS titles are well-behaved when run within Windows 95, USB isn't quite the savior we had hoped.

Thrustmaster also makes a joystick port version of Top Gun, which is about $20 cheaper, supports DOS titles, and works with a throttle and pedals. And while the USB version is a fine performer, consider its limitations before making the investment.

Price: $50
System Requirements: System with USB-aware motherboard and BIOS USB Patch or Windows 95, One USB port.
Vendor: Thrustmaster
(503) 615-3200
www.thrustmaster.com
Reader Service #: 317

APPEAL: Part-time fly-boys partial to Windows 95.

PROS: Stupid-simple installation; good feel in Windows 95 titles; solid calibration, cheap.

CONS: No onboard throttle; DOS titles supported only within Windows 95; can't be used with throttle or pedals.

CG RATED

★★☆☆☆ **REVIEW • DIAMOND FIREGL 1000**

So Where's the Fire?



by Loyd Case

The 3D Labs Permedia chip is one of the long-awaited 3D-accelerator chipsets. When coupled with the 3D Labs Delta chip—a floating point setup engine—it becomes the core of a moderately priced, professional 3D-accelerator. Diamond's FireGL 1000 is just such a card, but for gamers, 3D Studio Max performance probably isn't of interest, rather, they should pay attention to how well it handles games.

On the surface, the specs are relatively impressive, but when you dig deeper, you find a few holes in the architecture. For example, to do bilinear filtering, Permedia uses only 3-bit precision—and it shows. In the 3D WinBench quality tests, the image quality of the FireGL 1000's filtering leaves a lot to be desired, producing visible, chunky pixelization.

Performance is a mixed bag. We tested the card on a ABIT IT5H with a Pentium P54C/200 with 64MB of EDO DRAM. WinBench 97's business graphics WinMarks comes in at 58.1 (1024x768x16) and 57.1 (800x600x24). On 3D WinBench 97, FireGL posts a score of 53.1, well below the 120 posted by Diamond's 3Dfx-based Monster 3D. DOS performance is weak, with the DUKE NUKEM 3D benchmark showing 28fps versus the 45fps from STB's ET6000-based Lightspeed 128. QUAKE is a little slower as well, with a score in TimeDemo 1 of 44.1fps at 320x200 versus 48.1 for the ET6000 card. Finally, there's no VESA 2.0 support in ROM, so you'll need to get a utility like Display Doctor.

FireGL 1000 supports up to 8MB of SGRAM, and comes with a set of utilities tuned to the needs of CAD and 3D modeling professionals. It's also capable of high refresh rates at high resolutions. If you're looking for a graphics card that is primarily a 3D CAD card at a low price, with gaming as a secondary feature, then FireGL is a contender. However, it's pricey, and the Direct3D performance and image quality aren't great, so it's not a good answer for hard-core 3D gaming.

Price: $299 with 4MB SGRAM
Manufacturer: Diamond FireGL 1000
Distributor: Diamond Multimedia, San Jose, CA
(800) 468-5846
www.diamondmm.com
Reader Service #: 318

APPEAL: 3D CAD designers who moonlight as part-time 3D gamers.

PROS: High memory capacity; good 2D Windows performance.

CONS: Poor 3D image quality; expensive; so-so DOS performance.

CG RATED

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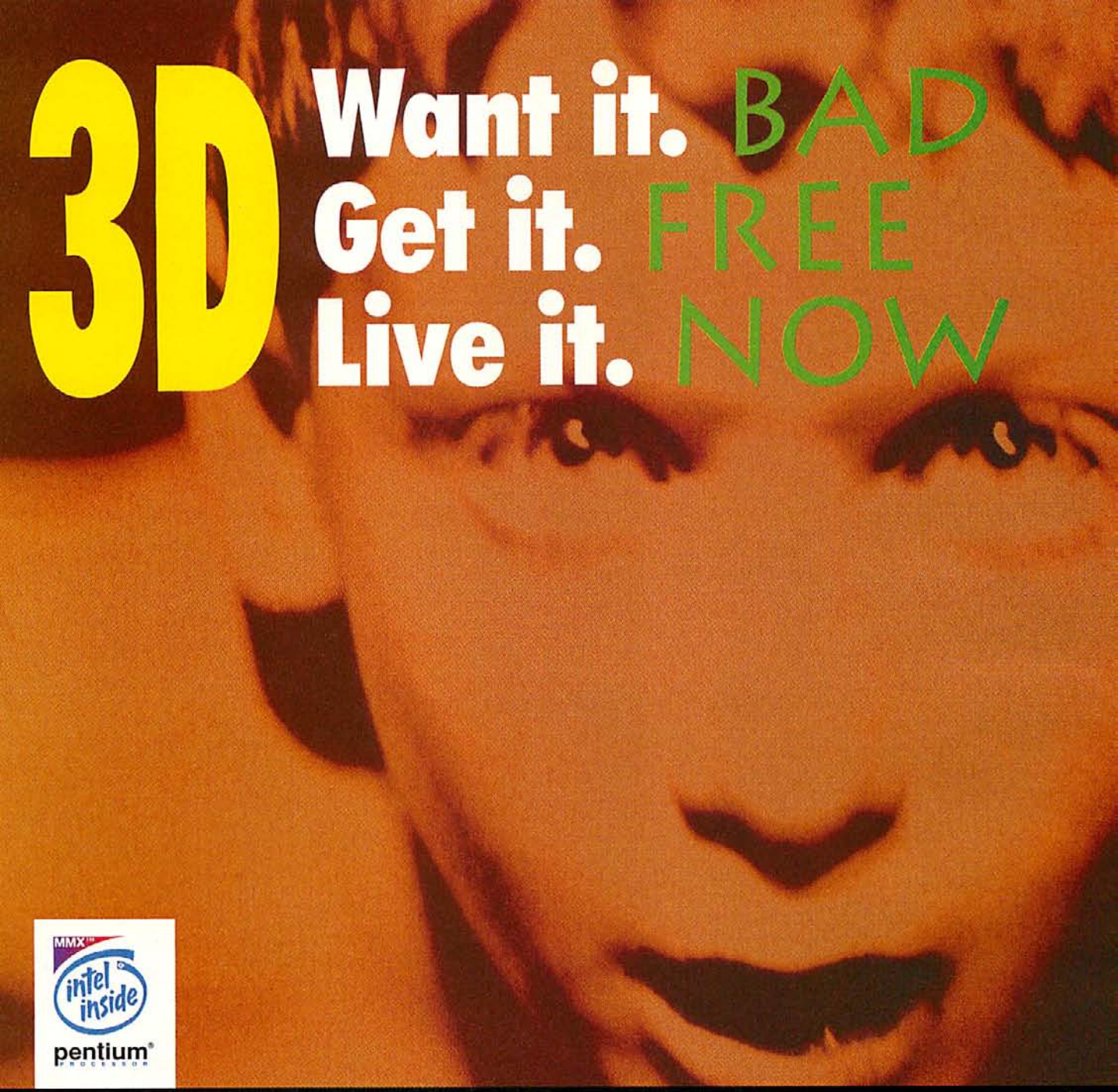
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Blue Byte

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- Microsoft® IntelliMouse®
- 2 USB Ports, 2 Serial Ports, 1 Parallel Port
- 17sd69 Monitor (16.0"viewable)

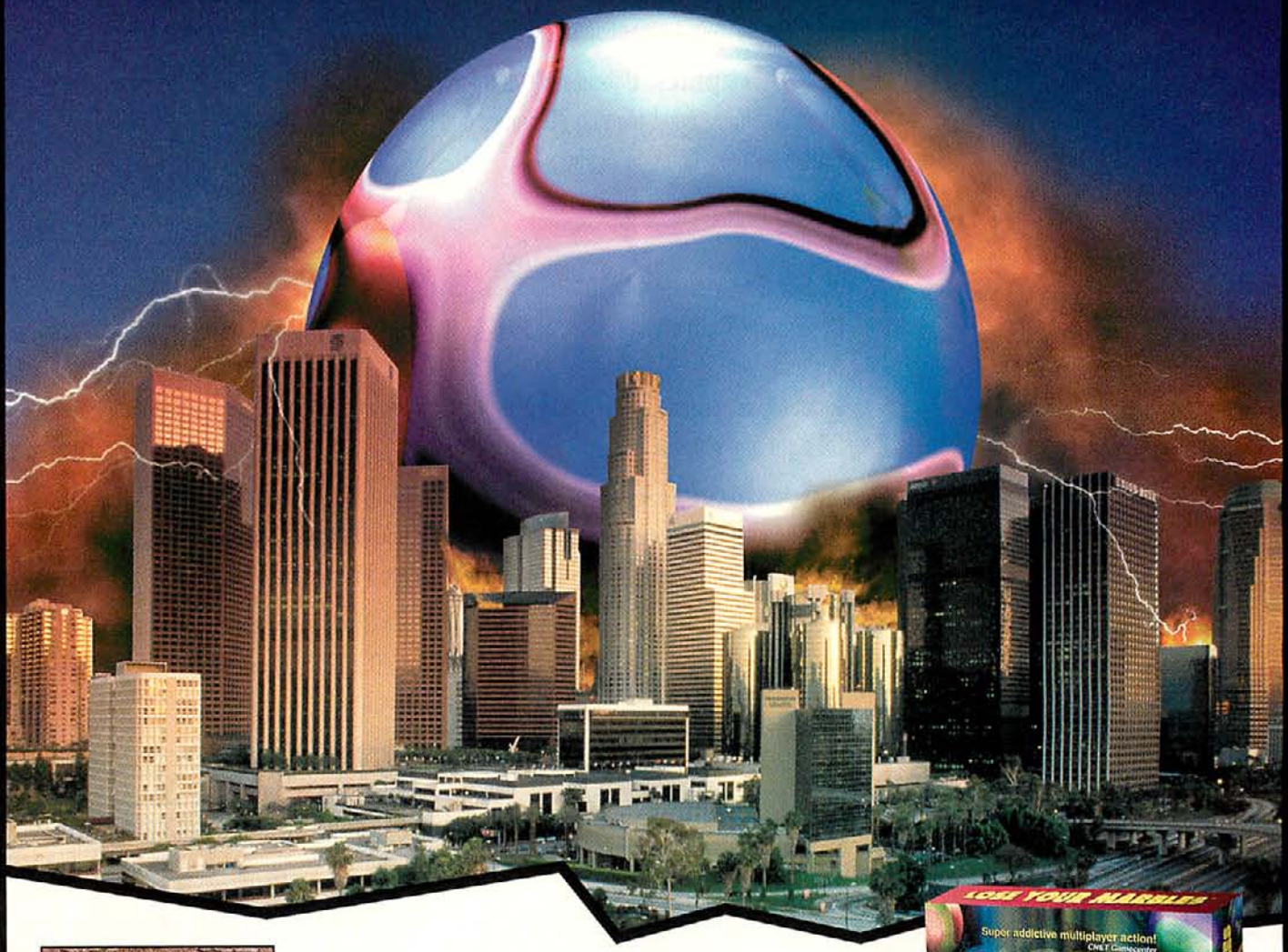
$3,119 model #499

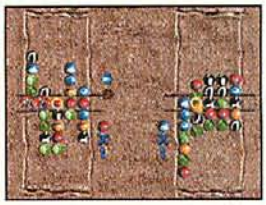
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #074

YET ANOTHER EVIL PLOT TO UNDERMINE THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE AMERICAN WORKER.





Work fast to match up marbles and make them disappear.

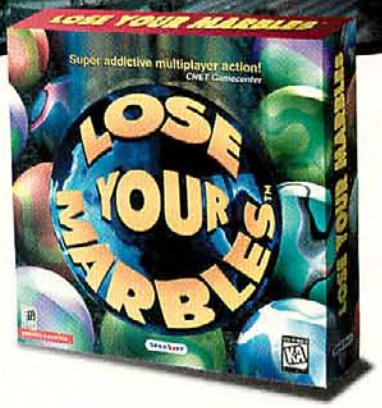


To win you have to Lose Your Marbles.

Lose Your Marbles. Bringing America to a grinding halt this September.

Free Demo available now at www.segasoft.com

System requirements: Windows 95 IBM PC or compatible with P60 MHZ processor, CD-ROM, 1 MB SVGA, 8 MB RAM, Direct X 3.0. Lockable door. Disconnectable phone. Authority to cancel prior commitments.



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KIDS TO ADULTS

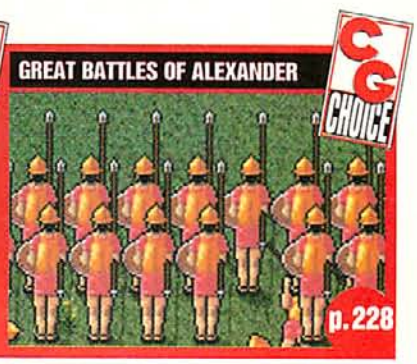
Designed for Microsoft Windows 95

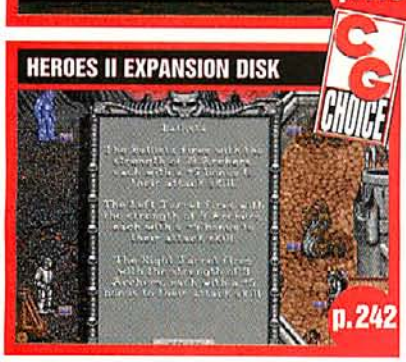
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CG Choice Games This Month









Reader Quote

I (agree) with Sandra Allison's letter. Too many games do have women killed, maimed, beaten, and naked. Don't get me wrong. I'm the guy who thinks WOLFENSTEIN 3-D should have included more than a few grateful frauleins for our hero to find, liberate, and thus get some well-earned R&R (if you know what I mean). Still, in my limited gaming experience I still can't figure out: DUKE NUKEM's dancers/naked captives; LEGACY OF KAIN's chained-up babes waiting to be drained by our vampire hero (why only women captives?); and TOMB RAIDER's Lara Croft. We finally get a strong woman central character, but she's been given a physique that's definitely Barbie-esque.

Is this because the target audience is not only 97 percent male but also males who have never gone on a date?

What can be done? How about a first-person 3D shooter like QUAKE that gives you the option of "sex of player" along with "your name" in the multiplayer setup? Thus, triggering the appropriate male or female voice when you jump, are wounded, killed, and the like. Could id issue it as a patch?

Also, thanks for the MYST explanation. Keep up the good work.

—Howard Hopkirk

SCORPIA'S REVIEW



Review Quote Of the Month

"CALLAHAN'S CROSSTIME SALOON is the funniest game I have played in four years."

—Charles Ardai

HOW DO WE RATE?

We only review finished products, not pre-release versions. The ratings are as follows:

★★★★★ **Outstanding:** The rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, and gameplay come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience. Our strongest buying recommendation.

★★★★☆ **Very Good:** A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. It may have minor problems, but is still worth your money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter or genre.

★★★☆☆ **Average:** A mixed bag. It can be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in several ways. It can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.

★★☆☆☆ **Weak:** A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or just a poorly-conceived game design—you should think long and hard before buying it.

★☆☆☆☆ **Abysmal:** The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so buggy, ill-conceived, or valueless that you wonder why they were ever released in the first place.



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TODAY, WE'D LIKE TO SHOW YOU HOW NICELY THEY'VE GROWN UP.

CGW CHOICE

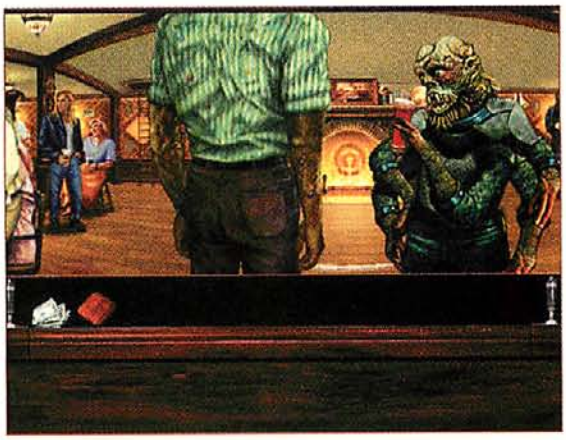
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Puns of Steel

Belly-laugh up to the Bar in Legend's Hilarious Romp

by Charles Ardai

I have a confession to make: Despite this magazine's enthusiastic sneak preview, I didn't expect much from CALLAHAN'S CROSSTIME SALOON. I don't know why. Spider Robinson is a very good, very funny, science-fiction writer. Josh Mandel, the game's designer, coauthored one of my all-time favorite games, Sierra's FREDDY PHARKAS, FRONTIER PHARMACIST. The publisher, Legend, has done some good work and some great work, but never anything really bad.



STRANGE BREW At Callahan's, you'll meet all sorts of creatures, such as the incomprehensible, multilimbed Squish.

But...games adapted from works of science fiction so rarely work, Robinson wasn't writing the game, and Mandel had also coauthored Sierra's SPACE QUEST VI, which was weak even by that series' declining standards. Plus, comedy, which is probably the hardest thing to get right in science fiction, is even harder to get right in a computer game. So, I went in prepared for the worst. I came out, many hours later, with what might modestly be called a changed opinion.



Price: $39.95
Minimum System Requirements: 486/66, DOS 5.0 or Win 95, 8MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, VESA-compatible or SVGA-graphics card, mouse; supports all Sound Blaster-compatible and other major sound cards.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Designer: Legend Entertainment
Publisher: Take 2 Interactive New York, NY (212) 941-2988
www.kaizen.net/legend/
Reader Service #: 319

BAR NONE

CALLAHAN'S CROSSTIME SALOON is the funniest game I have played in four years. 1993 was the year that not only FREDDY PHARKAS but also LucasArts' hilarious DAY OF THE TENTACLE came out. Since then, there have been sequels to almost every game you can name, but never a FREDDY PHARKAS 2 or a RETURN OF THE TENTACLE; and although attempts at comedy have been reported from time to time, the sound of actual laughter has been scarce indeed.

This game, as in the *Callahan* books, gives us a peek inside a Long Island bar that is rather more unusual on the inside than you'd expect from its conventional exterior. Mike Callahan, the proprietor, runs a friendly neighborhood joint, but the neighborhood he serves spans galaxies and eons. Time travelers, aliens, robots, vampires, and the occasional scruffy human all take their place at the rail.

Now, this notion is not unique to CALLAHAN'S — Lawrence Watt-Evans' award-winning story "Why I Left Harry's All-Night Hamburgers" told of a similar joint, and George Lucas' cantina in *Star Wars* seemed *Callahanian*, at least in its biological diversity. Steve Meretzky's new game, THE SPACE BAR, has a little CALLAHAN'S to it as well.

But what sets Callahan's apart from the other exotic watering holes, and what keeps readers coming back, is its overwhelming good nature. No blaster duels here — the weapons of choice in the nightly showdowns are puns, not guns. Not that Callahan's is some sort of sissified feel-good yuk parlor; it's just that the people (and other critters) who go there all have enormous affection for one another, sort of like Cliff, Norm, and the rest of the gang at Cheers.

The universe they inhabit is often a hostile one but, by working together, they beat the threats every time. What better premise for an adventure game? You've got a wide range of colorful characters, a series of interesting problems to solve, and a central location to return to between every two legs of the adventure. The stories have obvious adventure-game potential, and they include keeping a lonely vampire from killing himself by reuniting him with his lost love, rescuing a kidnapped bar buddy who happens to be a talking dog, and so on.

GAG ME

Still, it all would fall apart if the jokes were lame. Thankfully, they aren't. Here there be wit! Actual, honest-to-god wit! Funny remarks, clever puns, relentless running gags — and plenty of them. How often does a computer game make you laugh out loud even once? This one had me laughing from start to finish.

You can spend hours just clicking on one object after another simply to see what jokes you uncover. There aren't a lot of locations in the game — fewer than a dozen in each of the game's six "missions" — but you can examine each 360-degree view, and there are gags packed into every corner.

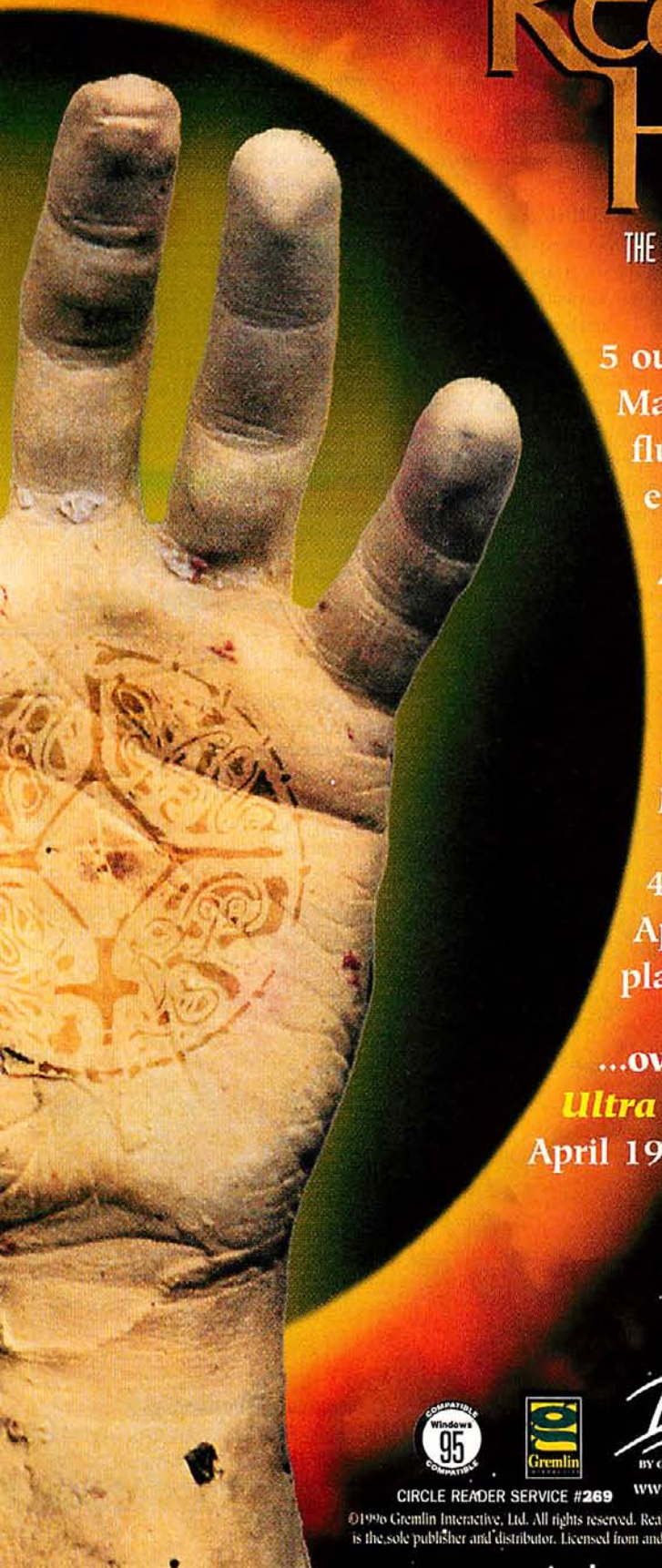
On an airstrip in Brazil (where you go to save the best chocolate in the world from a clear-cutting industrialist), you see a guard's shack in front of you, a man working on a jeep, and the plane you flew in on. All you have to do is knock the guard out with a little morphine, steal some supplies, and head off into the jungle — but if that's all you do, you're missing all the fun.

Click on the shack and your character, scruffy human Jake Stonebender, remarks that it looks ready to keel over — which would be particularly funny if the guard's name was "Neal," since then you'd get to see "the shack keel on Neal." A groaner, yes — well, maybe you'd rather pay more

Its time to see what the critics and gamers are all talking about.

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5 out of 5 stars ***Computer Life*** May 1997 "...offers one of the most fluid, absorbing fantasy-horror game experiences available."

4½ out of 5 stars ***CGW*** May 1997. "ROTH covers all the bases."

4 out of 5 stars ***Computer Games Strategy Plus*** May 1997 Stamp of Approval

4.5 rating out of 5 ***Game Pro*** April 1997. "You'll have a fine time playing in this Realm."

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #269

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STREET MART To get to Brazil and save Josie's beloved cacao trees, you're going to need a passport. Maybe this hip '70s leftover can help you.

attention to the jeep? Click on the spare tire on the ground beside it and the narrator will point out, "The gentleman with the jeep is obviously not working tirelessly." Click on the jeep itself and you're told, "That old wreck is getting a spare tire. And so is the jeep he's working on. Sorry, that was a jeep shot."

And not all of the comedy is of the punny one-liner variety (though some of the funniest is). There are also delicious dialogues, such as an argument you have in Transylvania with a coachman who grows more convinced that you're really a closet vampire the more you protest that you're not. Even the obligatory *Star Trek* jokes are a cut above—instead of some weary Spock or Scotty shtick, Mandel tosses in subtle gags about Losira (from the episode "That Which Survives") and the white-horned mugato.

PARTY CRASHING?

CALLAHAN'S doesn't slow down for a second. If you don't know what a mugato is, then you miss that particular joke, but it doesn't matter because there are another dozen racing at you at all times (jokes, not mugatos). That the stories are well told and the puzzles intricate and satisfying is almost beside the point—there is plenty to praise here, but it's the comedy that makes the experience.

Maybe the most impressive thing about this game is that the comedy is so good, it even makes up for a number of really shocking flubs, some of which are as small as typos ("slipts" for "splits," "Your are in the pot" for "Your beans are in the pot"), others of which include bugs that cause the game to crash completely. That the final version of a game this good still contains abundant crash bugs is embarrassing.

But make no mistake: CALLAHAN'S is a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful game, and I'm not just saying that because I get paid by the word. CALLAHAN'S left me with one of the biggest damn smiles a computer game has ever put on my face. And I'd come back in a heartbeat.

APPEAL: Not just Spider Robinson's readers or sci-fi fans—anyone who finds Leslie Nielsen's movies funny will love this game.

PROS: Densely packed with wit and nonsense—there's more laugh-out-loud jokes in any one scene than in most entire games.

CONS: A number of flaws; ranging from typos to game-crashing bugs.

CG RATED

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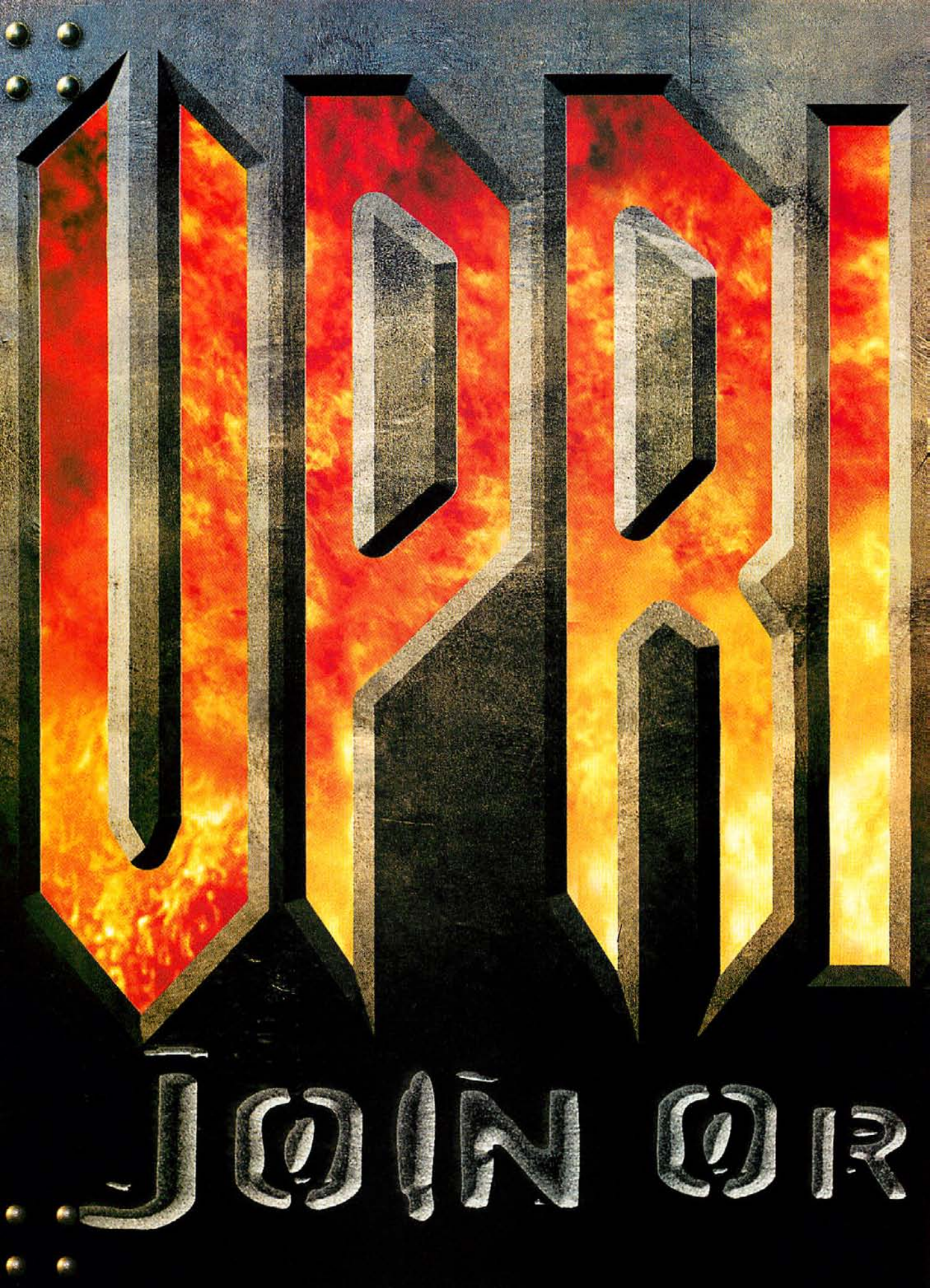
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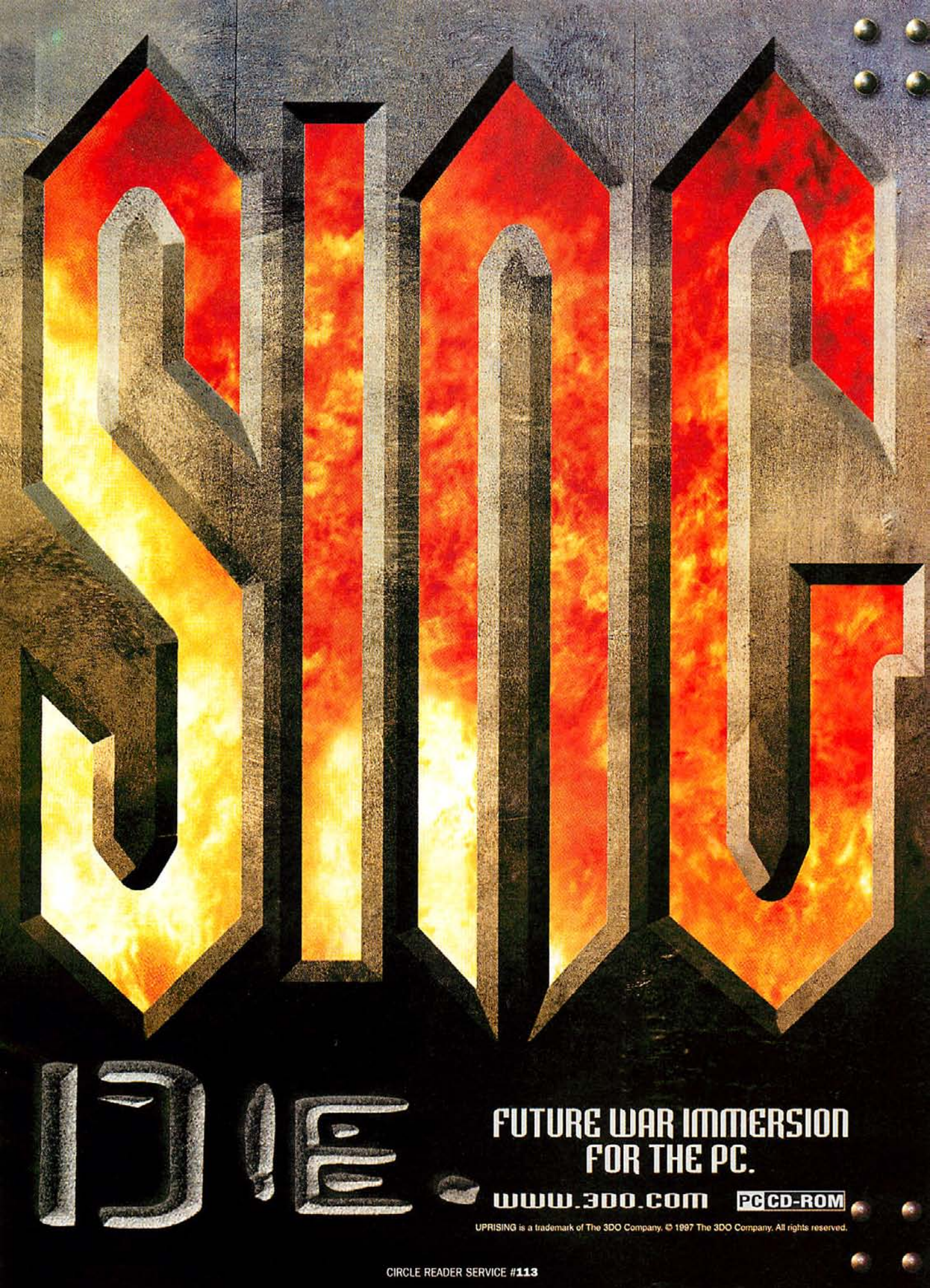
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Make It So-So

Star Trek: Generations Blandly Goes Where Others Have Gone Before

by Robert Coffey



MAP OF THE STARS Lots of time is spent in Stellar Cartography scanning planets and ships, plotting courses, searching for Soran, and reloading saved games.

What makes a great *Star Trek* episode? Is it the exciting forays into treacherous alien worlds? The frequently thoughtful, message-driven plots? The cut of Counselor Troi's velour jumpsuit? The most enduring episodes have deftly blended all these elements, resulting in television that quickens pulses as ably as it tickles cerebral neurons. STAR TREK: GENERATIONS aspires to master a similarly delicate balancing act, mixing puzzle-solving adventure fare, phaser-blasting shooter action, and a smattering of ship-to-ship space combat. Unfortunately, GENERATIONS' ambition is unfulfilled, culminating in a game likely to disappoint all but the most rabid *Star Trek* fans with its tepid play.



Price: $48.99
Minimum System Requirements: Windows 95, Pentium 90 or faster (P166 recommended), 16MB RAM (32MB recommended), 75MB hard drive space, high-color graphics for 640x480 16-bit color (2MB video RAM minimum and must be compatible with DirectX), 4x CD-ROM drive, DirectX-compatible sound card, MMX supported, mouse.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Designer/Publisher: MicroProse
Alameda, CA
Phone: (510) 522-3584
www.microprose.com
Reader Service #: 321

SHOOTING STARS

GENERATIONS takes its plot from the similarly titled film of a couple years ago. A twisted scientist named Soran is trying to get swept up once again in the Nexus, a galaxy-swimming ribbon of energy that creates unique paradises for every individual it engulfs. Soran has a problem, though: To reunite with the Nexus he will have to alter its course through the universe. The good news is he has a plan. The bad news is it involves imploding assorted suns with trilithium missiles.

Not surprisingly, the Federation boy scouts decide that the wholesale destruction of entire solar systems complete with all the life forms contained therein is probably a bad thing, so Captain Picard and crew are dispatched to thwart the efforts of Soran and the Romulans and renegade Klingons with whom he has allied himself. All of this is set up in the opening film sequence, which uses footage from the movie.

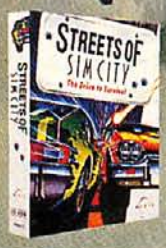
That footage and the quality voice-acting do a great job in giving GENERATIONS that special *Star Trek* flavor. The sneering malevolence of Malcolm McDowell as Soran, the dignity and determination of Patrick Stewart as Picard, and the lighthearted whimsy of Data (intoxicated by his new emotion chip) all highlight the gameplay. If anyone falls short of the thespian mark, it's William Shatner. His vocal performance as Kirk borders on a preening parody of himself, the nadir coming with the teddy-bear-in-a-pillow-fight sounds he makes when hit by phaser fire.

NEEDLE IN AN INTERSTELLAR HAYSTACK

Play begins with Picard and Data in Stellar Cartography. This interactive planetarium-cum-atlas is the hub of the game. From here you conduct both long- and short-range scans of planets and enemy vessels, searching for Soran's bio-signature in order to pursue him and foil his machinations. Using a straightforward, mouse-driven interface, scanning planets and setting courses for the *Enterprise* is a snap. Scanning planets rightly consumes game time but none of the information is saved, forcing you to perform redundant, time-wasting scans when following up clues for specific planets. Why a computer system as highly evolved as the *Enterprise*'s is incapable of retaining such basic information is patently illogical.

Once Soran is located, Picard will order a crew member to beam down for a solo away mission, and the meat of the game begins. Away missions take place in a first-person perspective in 3D worlds with sprite-based objects and creatures. Fully half of the screen is taken up by a needlessly huge inventory/automap/health status display. With the game-world passing by only in the letterboxed

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #256



CAPTAIN COURAGEOUS Picard's efforts to stop Soran on the *Enterprise* are thrilling, but replaying the entire mission because you couldn't find the deflector controls isn't.



PISTOL-PACKING BETAZOID Deanna Troi goes undercover as a Romulan to stop Soran. Avoiding confrontation at all costs, she carries a disruptor, and is stunning in her Romulan getup.

top portion of your monitor, the effect is similar to squinting through a mail slot. Items lying on the floor are easy to miss.

Why GENERATIONS requires a Pentium 90 and recommends a P166 is beyond me. Graphically, the game is nothing special, with worlds constructed in woefully limited palettes with precious little in the way of animation, and no interaction. Movement is uniformly sluggish, and attacking creatures and aliens move as stiffly and naturally as the characters in Disneyland's Pirates of the Caribbean. Missions can take nearly two minutes to load, and textures grow pixelated at just medium range. Where is all that horsepower going?

MIXED BAG

Even though it bills itself as an action game, GENERATIONS is really an adventure game with sporadic action elements. Every away mission requires some fairly unchallenging puzzle-solving to complete, but many of the missions actually encourage you to avoid firing your weapon. Gamers looking for the *Star Trek* equivalent of QUAKE aren't going to find it here.

Mission design is pretty uniform in its lack of inspiration, and missions demand that very little be done. When Worf infiltrates a renegade Klingon base, for example, he merely needs to find a security pass in order to access a ship, which he then easily sabotages. Many of the missions take place in fairly restricted worlds. Those that have larger areas to explore have nothing in them to make exploration worthwhile—no plot, no powerups, and no fun.

With all the different characters, the designers missed a real chance to make the away missions something special by utilizing the characters' personal attributes. Why can't Geordi use his enhanced vision to his advantage? Why can't Troi use her empathic abilities? Granted, Troi would probably just say, "I sense something, but it's so alien I'm not sure," but still....

The ship-to-ship tactical combat sounds promising, but is essentially an exercise in choosing one of a very limited selection of commands in order to destroy a distant target during unexciting battles. The *Enterprise* is often drastically outnumbered and outgunned, but most of these conflicts can be viewed as simple harassment sorties, since just showing up and then warping out before even engaging the enemy is sufficient to stop Soran from destroying a sun—which allows the game to continue apace.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT FRUSTRATION

Although some missions do start to draw you in (abetted greatly by the voice-acting), the enjoyment is quickly squelched by two things: sloppy controls and an abysmal save feature. The mouse easily aims your weapon, but keyboard keys control your movement. Though the keys can be reconfigured, the traditional DOOM setup isn't possible and you end up with something awkward instead.

Trying to run is the biggest problem. Holding down the Shift key starts you running, but only in a straight line—Starfleet may want to add turning while running to Academy curriculum. Even worse are the jumping sequences that pepper the game. Running jumps are often required, but once you start running you're stuck running—often right off the pillar or platform you just leapt onto—unless you take a quick, sprint-stopping step backward. Seemingly constant disc reads disrupt your jumping efforts and compound your aggravation.

But GENERATIONS' biggest downfall is its save feature. You can save only in Stellar Cartography, never during away missions, which forces you to start every failed mission from the beginning. Aside from having you thwarted by enemies, GENERATIONS packs other ways to ruin a mission: The chief offenders are dead-end areas and alien machines that you must figure out inside of a minute at the end of a mission. GENERATIONS' save feature is a blatant attempt to pad the playing time of a game that most gamers would finish quickly.

Had the designers provided more game than frustration, GENERATIONS could have been a winner. As it is, it fails to provide an engaging *Star Trek* experience and it should fail to get your gaming dollars.

APPEAL: Only those *Star Trek* fans with phaser sound-effects keychains.

PROS: Great voice-acting that brings characters to life.

CONS: Poor game engine; simple, boring missions; first-person and ship-to-ship action is sporadic and unexciting; sloppy, game-thwarting controls; lack of incremental save ensures the constant reloading of games.

CG RATED



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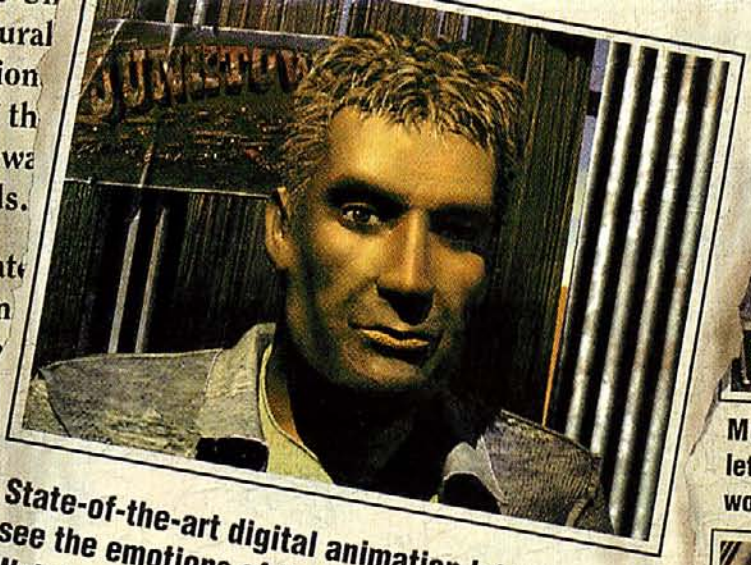
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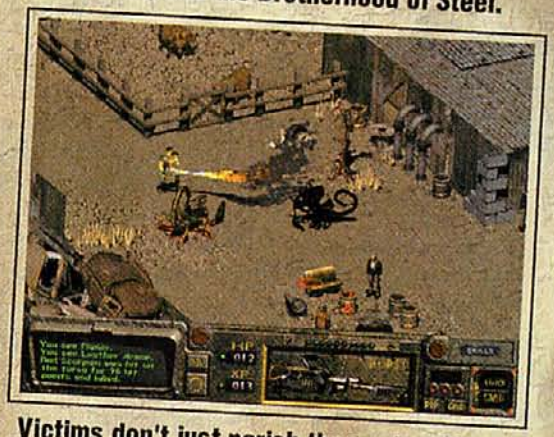
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Extreme Gaming

Blue Byte Assaults the Senses With an Action-Packed 3D Heli-thriller

by Gordon Goble



BRIGHT LIGHT The pyrotechnic displays in EXTREME ASSAULT are awesome. In fact, the game boasts some of the best 3D graphics of any game.

A voice screamed from within me, "Now you've done it! You've assaulted me for the last time. Sensory overload was not part of the arrangement." And with that, my brain tried to make a run for it. Seems that it had been exposed to a little too much stimuli recently, and it put the blame for its weakened condition squarely on Blue Byte Software's explosive 3D arcade-thriller EXTREME ASSAULT.

Luckily, we struck a last-minute deal, and the old cerebellum remained intact. But it was a deal with a heavy price. Sure, no more headaches and game hangovers, but no more Blue Byte games as well? I mean, that's torture, man!

Although by strict definition EXTREME ASSAULT is a 3D action shooter, you can take your definitions and stick 'em where the sun don't shine, because this baby's so good that genres just don't matter. Unless you're completely opposed to heavy artillery, EXTREME ASSAULT will tingle your spine, raise your hair, and thrill your soul in a way that very few games can.



Price: $49.99
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90 (P133 recommended), VLB-compatible graphics card (PCI card recommended), 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM; supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards and most joysticks.
Multiplayer support: LAN (1–4 players, one CD per player).
Designer: Blue Byte Software Inc.
Publisher: Blue Byte Software Inc.
Schaumburg, IL
(847) 995-9951
www.bluebyte.com
Reader Service #: 322

SLOW START

It's curious, then, that this extravagant affair opens in such an unassuming manner, without ostentatious introduction or fanfare. You'll start off by customizing your controls (I had some temporary problems configuring multibutton CH sticks, although the Thrustmaster equivalents are directly supported) and then picking a pilot. Four are available, representing easy, normal, difficult, and extreme gameplay (but only the latter two will see you through all six campaigns).

You are in charge of the futuristic Sioux AH-23 attack helicopter, and your upcoming challenge is a mystery to you as the fighting begins. From your first-person perspective you see a pair of choppers approaching in the distance. Target the first, wait for radar lock, begin shooting, then repeat this procedure. It's slow going, but later, things get interesting.

Each mission thereafter is prefaced with instructions from the robot-like big boss. Yet his robotic tonal qualities are offset by the urgency of this enigmatic situation. "Find their stinking hole in the ground and smoke the bastards out," is the sentiment that I remember best.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL JOYRIDE

While computer shooting has rarely been this much fun, the environment for your activities is darn near revolutionary. 3D worlds are nothing new, of course, but 3D this convincing, this interactive, this colorful, this detailed, and this varied is. I, for one, am hard-pressed to remember any 3D action game that looks and sounds this good, and that covers such a wide range of locales.

In the cockpit, you'll have a full-screen view of what lies ahead, which could be anything from steamy jungle to ice floe to underground cave to the internal workings of a monstrous alien vessel. Should you venture outside the sometimes-small confines of each theatre of operation, the game brands you a deserter, and ends your current mission, but these restrictions are outlined on your radar screen and are rarely annoying.

At high resolution with detail options cranked, EXTREME ASSAULT is smooth, solid, and floater-free, with crystal-clear objects and lighting that are above reproach. Convoys roll down highways, little trains (which, of course, you can blow up) run over realistic little bridges, branched trees sprout from mountainsides, and rivers run through it all. Underground, you'll dart in and out of the light amongst pillars and rails and machinery.

Shoot at anything, and the bullets leave an authentic impression. Fire a barrage at a building and you'll see a plume of smoke, then a wonderful depiction of flames, and finally, an explosion of immense graphic and aural ferocity.

Your reasonably intelligent opponents, meanwhile, are varied to the point of distraction. Blue Byte says there are almost 20 in all, but it certainly seems like more. Basic helicopters are prevalent at first, fol-

lowed by other airborne attack craft; tanks; horizontal and vertical gun placements; rotating turrets; creaking mechanical spiders; converted RVs; and watercraft of all shapes, sizes, and capabilities.

READY...AIM...FIREFIGHT

These mechanical menaces will hit you with rockets, lasers, illuminating death rays, and anything else they can get their evil paws on. Even the concussions and debris from nearby explosions can take their toll on your craft. It's a stunning pyrotechnic display, though some of the weaker weapons often look like little glowing diamonds—a bit hokey, but forgivable in the grand scheme of things.

Naturally, you'll locate some firefights along the way as well. Bigger and better stuff is available throughout the game, both as a reward for successful kills and as a bonus, tucked away in secret depots. Smart bombs are especially impressive, and divide into several separate and powerful shells to home in on every target within range.

Those who enjoy supervising mass destruction from alternate viewpoints will find a number of exceptional external views, each featuring correct perspectives and accurate movement. The game reaches its visual pinnacle with one of the most showy and rewarding conclusions I've ever had the pleasure to witness.

EXTREME ASSAULT doesn't allow for manual saves. Instead, it auto-saves at the last completed level, or gives you the option of automatic replay, should you fail. The game sports six campaigns and nearly 60 diverse missions in all, running the gamut from all-out attack to surveillance and exploration to defensive assignments. Whichever is the case, the action gets continually more frenzied and difficult as the game progresses.

Adding to this frenzy, or so you would think, is the "next generation T1 battle tank" Blue Byte has included as an alternative to the AH-23. The idea is to find it, hop in, and enjoy a new perspective on things. Unfortunately, the T1 is darned hard to locate, has nowhere near the fun factor of the chopper and, in single-player mode, is supported on very few levels. Apart from multiplayer modes, where it can be selected as the vehicle of choice, it's more a curiosity than anything else and certainly doesn't spawn the "2 games in 1" scenario some early rumors have suggested.

During installation, EXTREME ASSAULT will run a test on your equipment to determine which of its many supported video modes are right for you. A host of graphic options, including MMX support, the ability to turn transparencies on or off, viewing distance, and ground detail will further tailor the look to suit your computing power.

If you've got a fast Pentium, with or without MMX or a 3D accelerator, get ready to be blown away. Just don't forget to tell your brain that it's just a game.



SO SIOUX ME This is the Sioux AH-23, your vehicle in EXTREME ASSAULT, as seen from one of the game's many useful external views.

ASSAULT LIKE A PRO

There's no doubt about it—in order to make it through to the mind-blowing EXTREME ASSAULT conclusion, you'll have to shoot everything—including neutral structures, crates, trees, and even your own base (in the opening mission)! Bonuses and upgrades are everywhere.

Avert your eyes if you want to do it honestly, but here are some specific early hot spots that should get you a quick munition advantage. Blast away at the following: the hangar floor in Mission One, the church steeple in Mission Three, and the tunnel fan in Mission Six. By the way, check out the clock tower while you're hammering the church—it works.

It's also important to remember that your Sioux AH-23 is an extremely durable craft, especially when you tangle with scenery. Now, you don't want to go around smacking into walls or mountainsides, but dragging the thing across the ground causes no damage whatsoever and gives you a stability advantage in tight situations, all the while hiding you from the prying eyes of enemy radar.

Finally, EXTREME ASSAULT has a penchant for plunking you down in the heart of the action, a place you don't want to be right off the bat. There's nothing wrong with backing off a bit, moving out of the range of enemy radar, and surveying the situation before beginning your rampage. And don't forget: You're in a helicopter, not a jet plane. Use your chopper to its stealthy advantage.



ONE LESS CONVOY In this game, shoot at anything and everything. These smart bombs, which divide into multiple warheads, mop up the battlefield quickly.

APPEAL: Arcade helicopter pilots; anyone who appreciates great 3D and skull-crushing explosions.

PROS: Superb 3D environment; lovely visual effects that don't require an accelerator card; pounding audio; variety of missions in an amazing array of outdoor and indoor locations.

CONS: Some controller problems when configuring; viewing hats only work with Thrustmaster or programmable units; some missions are short; T1 tank a non-factor; no manual save feature.

CG RATED ★★★★★

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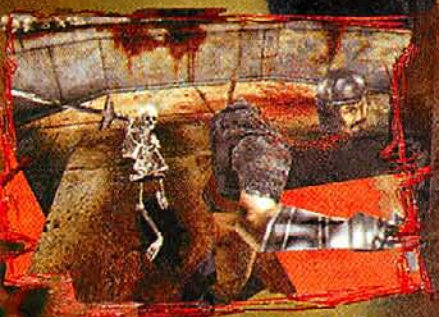
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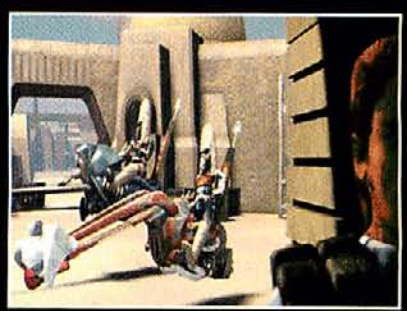




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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Lunar Travels

Liberate the Moon in Fenris Wolf's First-Person REBEL MOON Sequel

by Loyd Case

There's an old aphorism that's often said about weddings—something old, something new. You need a bit of each for good luck. REBEL MOON RISING is a 3D shooter that is also a mix of the old and the new—both in terms of gameplay and technology.

THE STORY SO FAR

REBEL MOON RISING is actually the second in a planned trilogy of games. The first game, REBEL MOON, was only available bundled in the Creative Labs 3D-Blaster line of graphics accelerators. The series covers the eventual revolution and secession of a lunar colony from Earth. Your character is a soldier in the Lunar Defense Force, taking on the blue suits of the United Nations, not to mention the real baddies from NDE (which is really Germany, reborn as a military power).

THE HYPE AND THE GLORY

First, let's cover the technology issues so we can leave them behind and check out gameplay. REBEL MOON RISING makes use of Intel's new MMX technology. Fenris Wolf used MMX to gain a reasonable frame rate at high resolutions with 16-bit color. This let them create dynamic lighting effects that could change on the fly and even move with the different characters. For example, a moving orange glow might indicate a nearby enemy jump trooper.

Another new technology feature is voice recognition. One early Windows 95 game, ACES OF THE DEEP, used speech recognition, but the implementation was very limited. In REBEL MOON RISING, the list of usable words is quite large. While you can actually give orders to AI squad mates in a limited way, it's mostly used to communicate with other players in multiplayer games. You can speak into the microphone to chat, rather than having to hunt for keyboard commands—something especially handy for Internet play, which the game also supports. Of course, the vocabulary that's actually put on the screen may vary a bit from what's spoken into the microphone—let's just say that colorful language translates into a more refined choice of phrases.

Where REBEL MOON RISING doesn't break new ground is in graphics. Although it does use 16-bit color, the style is still "2 1/2D," in the style of DUKE NUKEM 3D. The characters and some of the scenery are rendered as sprites with limited viewing angles, not as real 3D shapes. The textures look a bit better, though, and don't pixelate until you are right up against the wall.

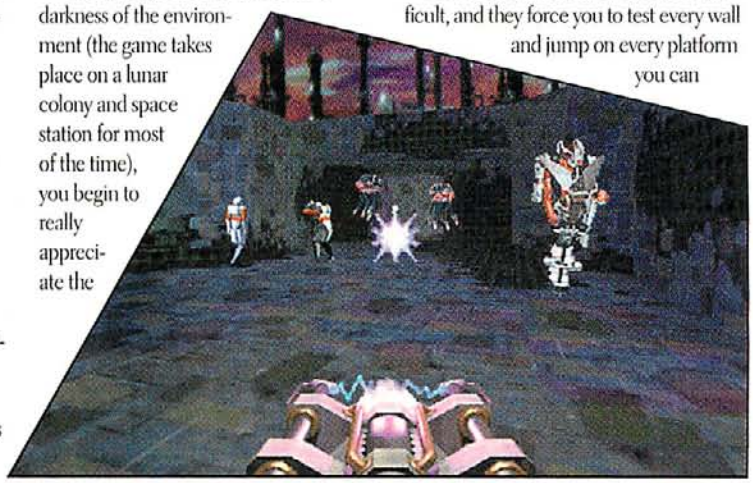
HUNT THE WUMPUS

REBEL MOON RISING is conceived as a fairly difficult game—one for experienced players of 3D shooters. So, it's a bit surprising that the first several of missions are really training missions. Once you launch into the meat of the game (after mission four) the true nature of the game emerges.

Once you get used to the relative darkness of the environment (the game takes place on a lunar colony and space station for most of the time), you begin to really appreciate the lighting effects, which add some nice cues to the game. The mix of weapons is also pretty good. The problem with REBEL MOON RISING is that too much time is spent hunting for hidden switches or secret doors.

Another potentially interesting part of the game that ends up being a bit flawed is oxygen management. Since you're on the moon or a space station for most of the mission, O_2 is a limited resource. Nearly every mission starts you out with a small amount of oxygen. Either you complete the mission very quickly, or you spend a lot of time hunting down oxygen recyclers. Sometimes the regenerators are in plain view, and you just have to figure out how to reach them. Okay, I'll grant you that oxygen will be in scarce supply (particularly early on in the game). But as you become one of the elite LDF commandos, you'd think your commander would give you an O_2 recycling unit—especially since you've found a few by the later parts of the game. And having limited oxygen on a supposedly pressurized space station borders on the silly.

Some of the level layouts are quite difficult, and they force you to test every wall and jump on every platform you can



GALACTIC CIVIL WAR REBEL MOON RISING has some nice innovations in technology and gameplay, but also suffers from some repetition and a dated look.



Price: $42.99
Minimum System Requirements: MMX Pentium processor, 16MB RAM, 35MB hard drive space, Windows 95, 4x CD-ROM drive, 16-bit PCI video card, Windows 95-compatible sound card.
Multiplayer Support: Modem, direct connect (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-8 players).
Designer: Fenris Wolf
Publisher: GT Interactive
New York, NY
(212) 726-6500
www.gtinteractive.com
Reader Service #: 323

reach. It all gets old after awhile. This game harks back to adventure games that seem longer just because the puzzles are arbitrary and difficult, not because the game is really that much bigger.

The LDF Journal

For some quick cheats for REBEL MOON RISING, check out this month's CG Tips, where we list the codes to give you weapons, jump levels, and gain invulnerability, among other goodies. For a complete walkthrough of the game, visit Fenris Wolf's Web site at **www.fenriswolf.com.**

MISSION PLAUSIBLE

Where REBEL MOON RISING does break new ground in 3D-action shooters is in mission design (as opposed to level design). There are a couple of missions in which you defend a location. You can either choose to run around frantically, trying to defend against multiple attackers as they teleport in, or you can find the switch that will bring in reinforcements. The reinforcements are about as dumb as the AI opponents, but they do help buffer the target against the opposing forces.



BABY-SITTING Here we're escorting an alien baby, as laser blasts light up the environment. This is an example of the more creative mission design.

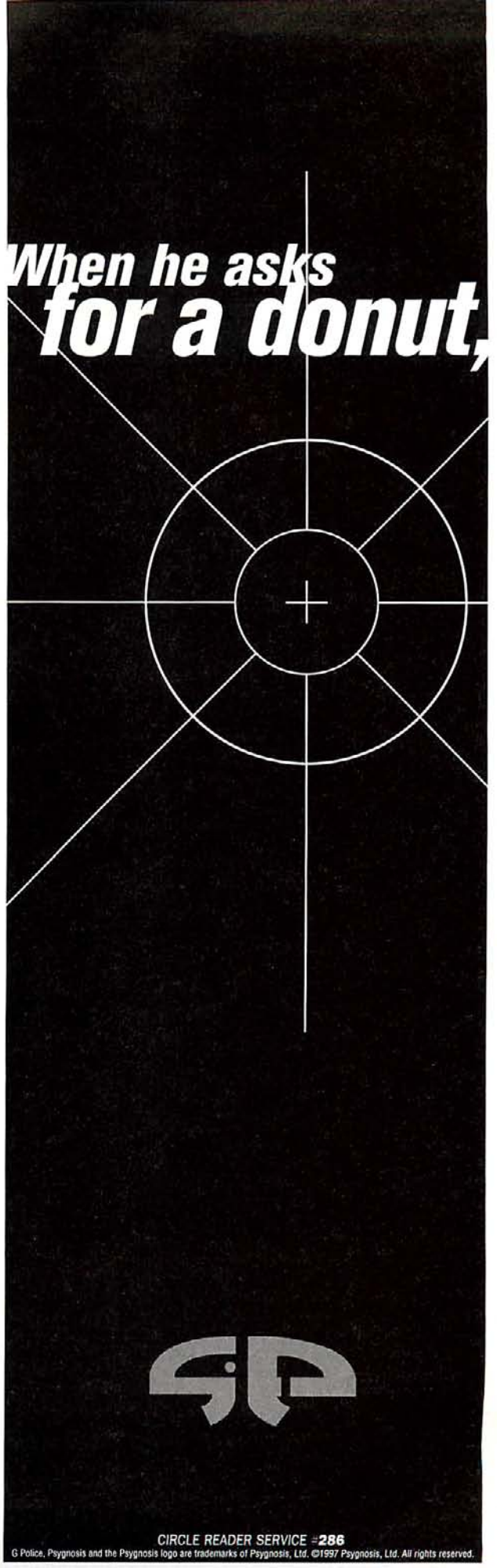
The two best missions in the game are ones where you escort prisoners—in one case, alien babies—to a hand-off point. The suspense gets pretty intense as you move with your charge and try to keep the enemies from picking them off. It's also somehow more personal than similar missions in flight sims. When one of the alien babies was killed, I felt a very real sense of outrage and emptied most of a magazine into the enemy that had shot it.

Some of the other missions which involve searching for and destroying a specific set of objectives are more creative than the "if it moves, shoot it" philosophy in most 3D-action games.

All of this takes place in the context of a relatively interesting story. It's too bad that Fenris Wolf's budget didn't enable them to do some animated cut-scenes between some of the missions. Also, it would have been interesting on occasion to have squad mates along for the whole mission, much like in Bungie's MARATHON series.

THE DIVINE ENEMY

Like most 3D shooters, RMR supports multiplayer play, either over a local area network (IPX or



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WATCH MY BACK More clever gameplay includes the ability to call in reinforcements, as well as fight at the squad level in deathmatch.

TCP/IP), Internet TCP/IP, modem, or direct connect. The scenarios are combat (deathmatch-style), squad (team deathmatch), and capture the flag. In capture the flag, getting the flag back to your own base is worth 10 frags—but to get credit, your own flag needs to be at your base as well. In both squad and capture-the-flag play, you can call for AI assistance (but only once, until all teams have done so), but AI kills don't count toward the team total. In an interesting twist, you can switch sides at any time, thus making new friends and new enemies in a single keystroke.

Internet play has the usual latency problems, though not as bad as in some games. It's very easy to set up an Internet game—RMR will even run winipcfg (an IP configuration utility built into Windows 95) for you, which enables you to get your current IP address.

MAKING THE GRADE

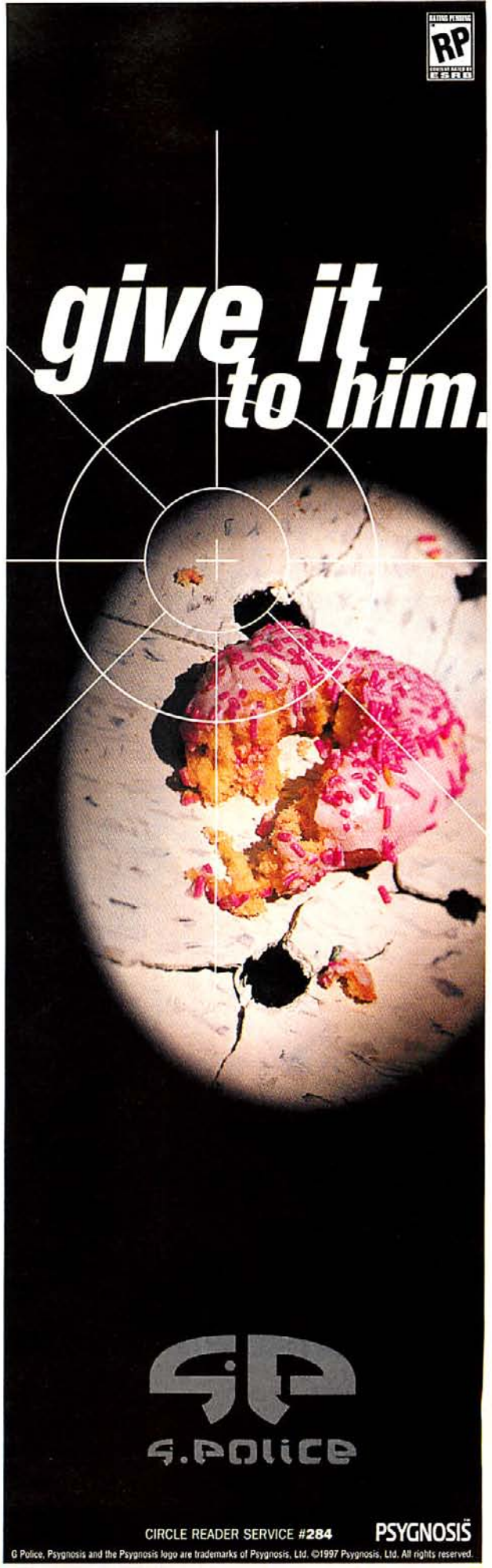
REBEL MOON RISING is a reasonably good, entertaining game that uses new technology in interesting ways. While it's not outstanding, it has an interesting story and some highly creative missions. If you have an MMX system, it's certainly worth giving the shareware version a try—but remember, the first four missions aren't really the game. This game is almost worth having just for the escort missions. Multiplayer is nicely implemented, and while the sprite-based look is a little dated, it makes for some fun multiplayer action. It's just too bad that most of the time is spent hunting switches and oxygen recyclers; these artificial puzzles add a jarring and frustrating element to an otherwise solid game.

APPEAL: 3D-action gamers who want to see what MMX can really do.

PROS: Interesting back story; several creative missions; good multiplayer action.

CONS: Some levels are frustrating hunts for switches and O_2 supply; requires MMX system; the graphics are a bit dated.

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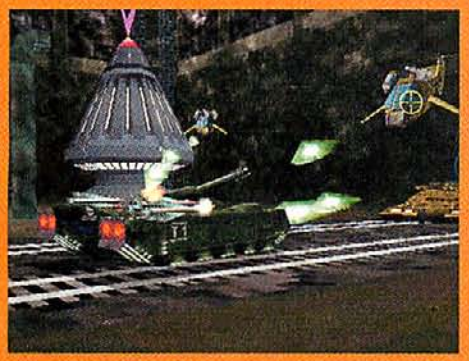
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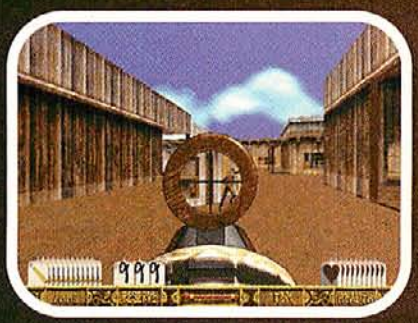
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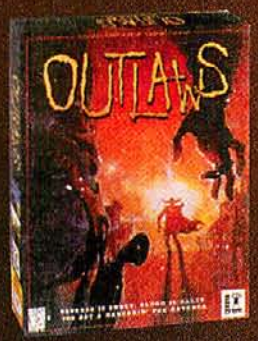


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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Lost in 2D

The Lost Vikings Return in Interplay's 2D-Action Platform Sequel

by Kelly Rickards

In a market that embraces all things 3D—especially action games—it is refreshing to see a solid 2D title like NORSE BY NORSEWEST. In a nutshell, NBN (the sequel to the platform game THE LOST VIKINGS) is a 2D, side-scrolling action/puzzle game. You play three bumbling Vikings who are set adrift in time and must find the evil Tomator's time-travel machine to get back home.



UNDER FIRE This falling lava (which Olaf has to block so the others can pass) is the first easy puzzle you encounter. The latter ones get exponentially harder.

SCANDINAVIAN TROIKA

Each Viking has specific abilities and attributes that the gamer must master in order to complete each level. Eric the Swift is the fastest-moving character, and he is the only one who can swim, so you need to use him to activate underwater switches and grab sunken items. Eric is also the only Viking who can jump. Baleog the Fierce has a sword and, more importantly, an extending bionic arm, which he can use for swinging (PITFALL HARRY-style), attacking faraway enemies, or grabbing out-of-reach items. Olaf the Stout is useful for holding enemies at bay with his shield. He also has the ability to, ahem, fart to destroy unstable floors or to give him an extra lift while gliding. In the later levels, the gamer can also control two additional characters, Fang the Werewolf and Scorch the fire-breathing Dragon.

NORSE BY NORSEWEST is basically one of those "items" games. Get all the items (keys, switches, power-ups) and you progress to the next level. If you miss an item, you won't advance to the next level. Also, you cannot complete the level if any of your Vikings die.

ACTION OR ADVENTURE?

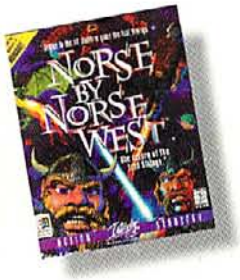
I look at NORSE BY NORSEWEST as an action game with environmental puzzles. It's the way each level is designed and how the items are placed that give the game its puzzle element. The game starts out with shorter, more predictable levels but, as you progress, the puzzles become increasingly difficult, with later levels introducing twists to previous puzzles or, in some cases, new puzzle elements entirely.

The big problem with the game is that you can control only one Viking at a time and you sometimes must trade items between Vikings, which in effect, pauses the gameplay. While this presents less of a problem in the earlier levels, later in the game some of the puzzles and items are so spread out that it really becomes "stop and go" gameplay. At times, it seems as if you spend a third of your time switching between Vikings, another third moving your Vikings across the level one at a time, and only one third of the time actually playing the game.

To be fair, this doesn't happen all the time, and it's a relatively minor gripe. Overall, NORSE BY NORSEWEST is a well-designed game. The character animation is smooth as silk, the artwork is easy on the eyes, and the gameplay is challenging, with brain-busting puzzles. For those who are looking for a unique and fun 2D-action game that massages the brain and doesn't take itself seriously, NORSE BY NORSEWEST is it. If you're looking for a game with good replay value, however, look elsewhere.



LOST VIKINGS II NORSE is the sequel to Interplay's 16-bit platformer, LOST VIKINGS. It has nice graphics, good 2D gameplay, and the LOST VIKINGS humor.



Price: $39.95
Minimum System Requirements: 486/100 for DOS play, Pentium 60 for Win95 play, 16MB RAM, 4MB hard drive space, Windows 95 or DOS 5.0, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics, 100-percent Microsoft-compatible mouse, Sound Blaster-compatible sound card.
Multiplayer Support: Hotseat (2 players)
Designer: Silicon & Synapses Inc.
Publisher: Interplay
Irvine, CA
(714) 553-6678
www.interplay.com
Reader Service #: 325

APPEAL: Action fans looking for a smart and fun 2D platform-game.

PROS: Good graphics and animation; challenging puzzles; fun 2D gameplay.

CONS: Too much switching between Vikings in later levels; gameplay is a bit too linear; some puzzles are awkward.

CG RATED ★★★

Par-tee Time



Sierra's MiniGolf Is a Fun-Filled Frolic for the Whole Family

by Charlotte Panther

If you're looking for an enticing way to lure your Luddite father or your technophobic granny into playing computer games, 3-D ULTRA MINIGOLF could well be the way to win them over. Sierra's simple, yet captivating, electronic version of the popular pastime (which translates surprisingly well to the PC), combines traditional elements of mini golf with the wacky originality and high jinx we've come to expect from the 3-D ULTRA series.

TEE TIME

The game is made up of two nine-hole courses which can be played separately or together as an eighteen-hole course. Or, if you're in a real hurry, you can play just one hole at a time. MINIGOLF offers three styles of gameplay. Normal MiniGolf follows the same basic premise as the outdoor version—hit the ball in the hole, and do it under par. Hole-By-Hole is a do-or-die competitive round, for 2–4 players, in which the first person to sink the ball wins the point, regardless of par. The final option, Race Play, allows you (and up to three competitors) to play against the clock.

MINIGOLF mixes a few familiar holes (The Windmill, The Lighthouse) with a whole host of new surprises. Each hole has background music that can be toggled on and off, along with crazy sound effects, animation, and great commentary (check out the Valley Girl in Neptune's Kingdom, who chides, "Hey blue, get a clue") that made the other 3-D ULTRA titles hits.

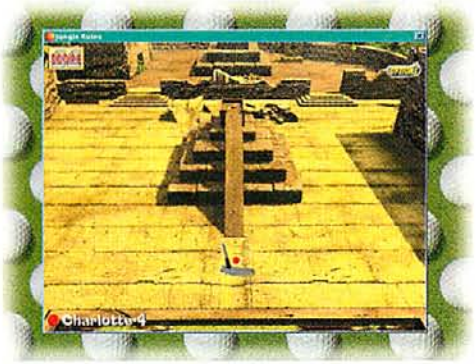


DAILY GRIND While Mr. Dino labors away, you must shoot the ball through the hollow log.

On your quest to hit a hole-in-one, you'll journey from the North Pole to the jungle; from Fairy Land to the Jurassic age. Frogs and bats will carry your ball toward the hole, while other creatures will throw it back to your starting point. You'll meet penguins, polar bears, even the Abominable Snowman on paths laced with obstacles. Lasers inside The Rocket will zap your ball to dust. And beware: Flowing rivers of water and lava cost penalty points.

On the downside, although all this flotsam and jetsam definitely adds to the game, it can, at times, prove overly frustrating. More than once, my ball got stuck beneath a pile of stones in Jungle Ruins. Unfortunately, unlike in real mini golf, in which you can use your club to poke the ball out of a tight spot, the only solution here is to restart the hole.

Another disappointment was the absence of Internet, modem, and LAN play. While hot-seating works well, the game seems like it would be an ideal candidate for these other multiplayer options.



ARCHAEOLOGIST WANTED It may look easy, but digging through the rubble to reach this hole is quite a challenge.

A COURSE TOO SHORT

While the game offers two skill levels in the form of putting options—Easy Putt, which requires just a click of the mouse to get the ball rolling, and True Putt, which allows you to control the force and angle of the putt with your mouse—experienced gamers will not find MINIGOLF too difficult to master. It took me less than an hour to complete the whole course the first time around, and while the challenge lies in replaying the game to lower your par, the novelty of the holes soon wears thin.

Though not as challenging as the earlier 3-D ULTRA titles, (3-D ULTRA PINBALL and CREEPNIGHT), MINIGOLF is nonetheless a well thought-out, original, entertaining game that will appeal to more than just the mini-golf fanatic.

APPEAL: Families who want a game that will appeal to everyone; newbies and veteran gamers looking for desktop distraction.

PROS: Easy to pick up; maintains humor and personality of the 3-D ULTRA line; great graphics and animation.

CONS: Holes are too easy and too few; low replayability; no Internet, modem, or LAN play.

CG RATED ★★★



Price: $44.95
Minimum System Requirements: 486DX2/66 (Pentium recommended), 8MB RAM (16MB recommended), 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), 12MB hard disk space, 30MB swap file for small install, Windows 3.1 or higher, 640x480 graphics with 256 colors, Sound Blaster 16 or 100-percent compatible, Microsoft-compatible mouse.
Multiplayer Support: Hotseat (1–4 players)
Designer: Dynamix
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
Bellevue, WA
(800) 757-7707
www.sierra.com
Reader Service #: 326

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Maps R Us

DEATHMATCH MAKER Makes QUAKE Level Design Easier Than Shooting Fish in a Barrel

by V. Long

Any time id Software, the creator of QUAKE, does something—whether it be an announcement or a release—gamers sit up and take notice. So Virtus Corporation, best known for its 3D-CAD tools, was thrust into the spotlight when id gave the nod for Virtus' DEATHMATCH MAKER to be the first authorized QUAKE level editor.

Indeed, what makes DEATHMATCH MAKER stand out from the other level editing programs is its relative ease of use. American McGee, an id level designer, remarked, "This [program] makes QUAKE editing available to everyone."

THE DEVIL'S TOOLBOX

The main interface consists of four parts: tabs for the galleries and textures, an enlargement of the selected item or texture, the design window (where the actual editing takes place), and the walk window (where you can actually walk through the level in realtime as you are constructing it).

DEATHMATCH MAKER includes a variety of prefabricated templates for rooms, hallways, and sloping walkways under the gallery tab. The gallery tab also includes other ready-made objects, such as bad guys, guns and ammo, lights, slipgates, power-ups, and more. Simply drag and drop the selected rooms and objects to the design window, where you can manipulate them to your heart's content. It doesn't get much easier than this.

To give novices a flying start on level design, DEATHMATCH MAKER also includes templates for ten entire levels—just pick one and modify it as you please. Veterans will appreciate the various time- and effort-saving capabilities, such as hulling (for creating hollow objects like rooms, shafts, and corridors), layering (for controlling the complexity of the displayed objects), and vertex manipulation (for generating a convex object of any size or shape by clicking and connecting points in space).

The QBSP, LIGHT, and VIS utilities (required for compiling, lighting, and visually optimizing your creations into bona fide QUAKE levels) are fully integrated into DEATHMATCH MAKER. DEATHMATCH MAKER can generate single-player levels as easily as it does multi-player, and levels created with it will also work with GL QUAKE.

3D IS 3D

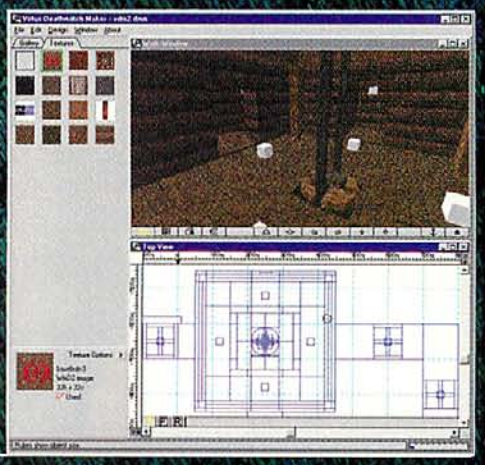
Making sense of 2D maps on a 2D computer monitor à la DOOM or DUKE NUKEM is fairly easy for most people. However, everything gets complicated extremely quickly when you try depicting and manipulating 3D objects and spaces on that flat 2D display. So even the best tools won't do the trick unless there's some guidance to help the first-timer up the steep part of the 3D-design learning curve.



Price: $29.95
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium processor, 8MB RAM (16MB RAM recommended), 40MB hard disk space, Windows 95, SVGA graphics, CD-ROM drive, registered version of QUAKE (additional 80MB hard-disk space), mouse.
Multiplayer Support: n/a
Designer: Virtus Corporation
Publisher: Macmillan Digital Publishing USA
Indianapolis, IN
(800) 716-0044
www.deathmatchmaker.com
Reader Service #: 327

More Tools

The success of almost any project depends heavily on the tools used. When it comes to level editing, experienced enthusiasts each have their own preferences, and rabidly stand by their choices. Many of the current shareware and freeware editors—like BSP, qED, QuArK, Stoneless, Thred, and Worldcraft (see February 1997, *CGW*, p.160)—are quite powerful, but suit different styles. Fortunately, it won't cost you $29.95 to find out whether DEATHMATCH MAKER is for you. Test-drive it for free by downloading the demo version from **www.deathmatch-maker.com**.



EDITING MADE EASY DEATHMATCH MAKER is perfect for easy level editing; it has an intuitive drag-and-drop interface, and an info-packed manual.

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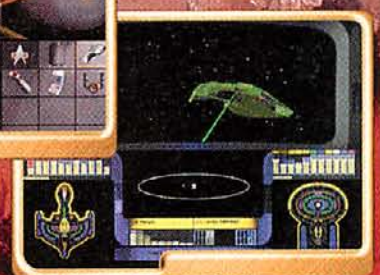




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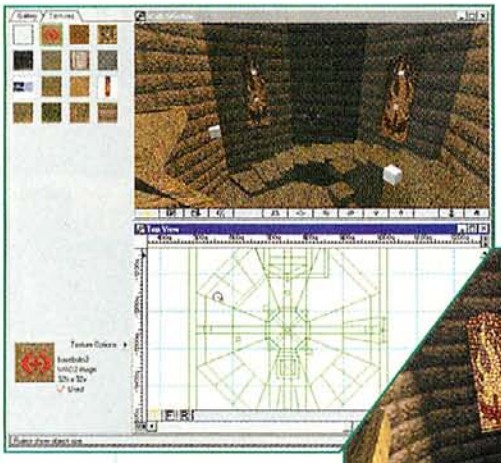
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RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Fortunately, Virtus provides an excellent manual, which includes thorough explanations of everything you'll need to know to get started with confidence. The manual shows you how to plan a level; shares tips and tricks; and describes all functions, tools, menus, and interfaces in DEATHMATCH MAKER. It also includes a tutorial that will have you building your first functional level within 30 minutes.



BEFORE... On the top you'll see the editing environment, with your gallery, design window, and walk window, where a spiral staircase is being built.



...AND AFTER On the bottom is the finished product.

As easy as DEATHMATCH MAKER is to use, keep in mind that the design and implementation of large, richly detailed environments like the kind you find in QUAKE or its mission packs requires a lot of time and skill (which only comes with even more time).

No matter how easy any level editor makes the design process, so far, none can save you from the two common mistakes that are not entirely exclusive to newbies: placing the player's start position partially or totally inside a solid object, or completely forgetting to include the player start position at all.

ALL'S NOT WELL

Although DEATHMATCH MAKER provides extensive capabilities for manipulating objects, it could use more standard object-creation tools. I found only two object-creation tools: one for rectangular objects, and the other for convex, irregularly shaped objects.

DEATHMATCH MAKER requires a lot of hard-drive real estate for the full installation, primarily because Virtus had to include its own textures. Also, unless you have a lot of RAM, make sure you have enough swap space on your drive left after the installation or DEATHMATCH MAKER might refuse to run.

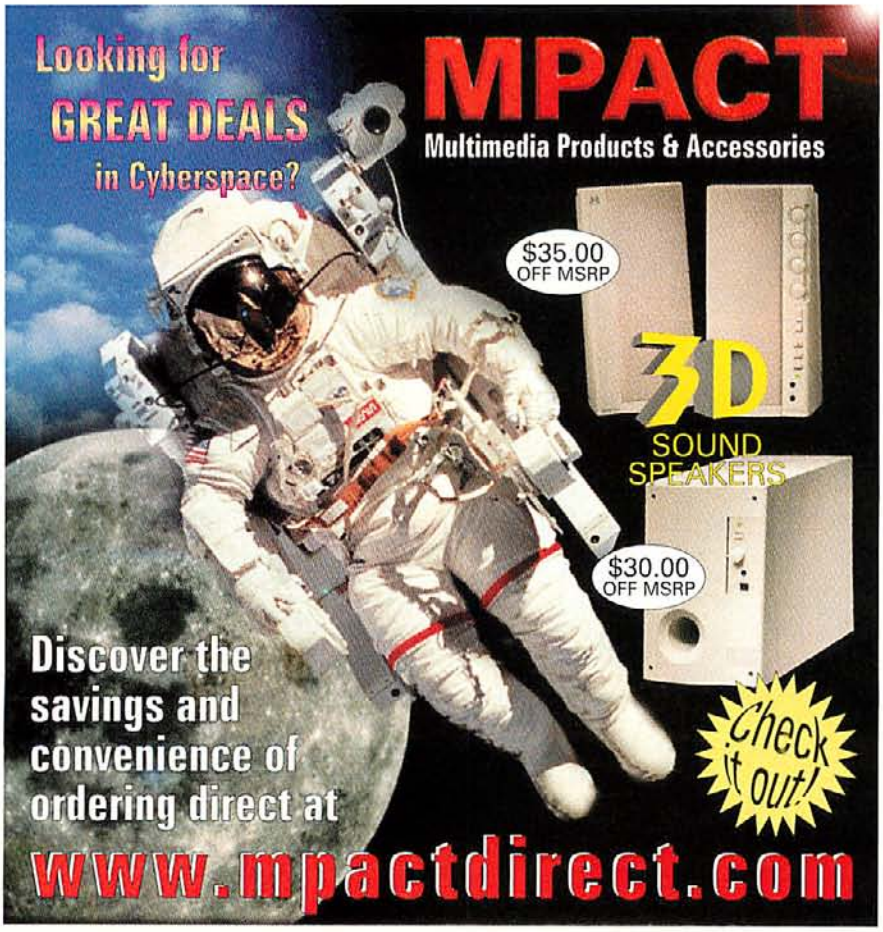
So the next time you hunger for some mayhem in the hallways of your school or office, try your hand at recreating those killzones with DEATHMATCH MAKER. Maybe it'll help you work off some steam before you do some real damage.

APPEAL: Novice and veteran level designers looking for a fast, easy QUAKE level editor.

PROS: Intuitive drag and drop interface; prefabricated levels, objects, and textures; excellent manual.

CONS: Hard-disk hog; could use more standard object-creation options.

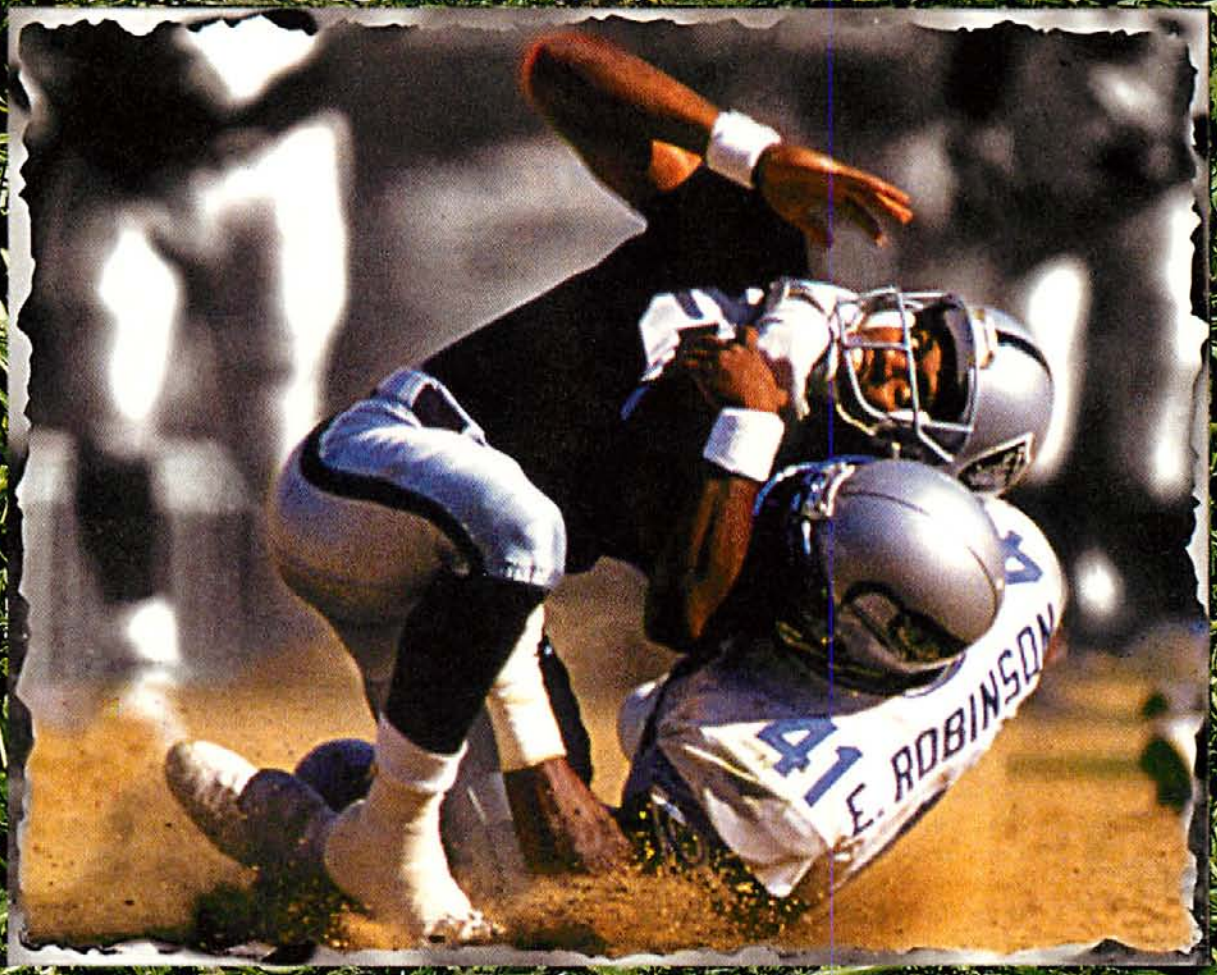
CG RATED ★★★★



CIRCLE READER SERVICE #045

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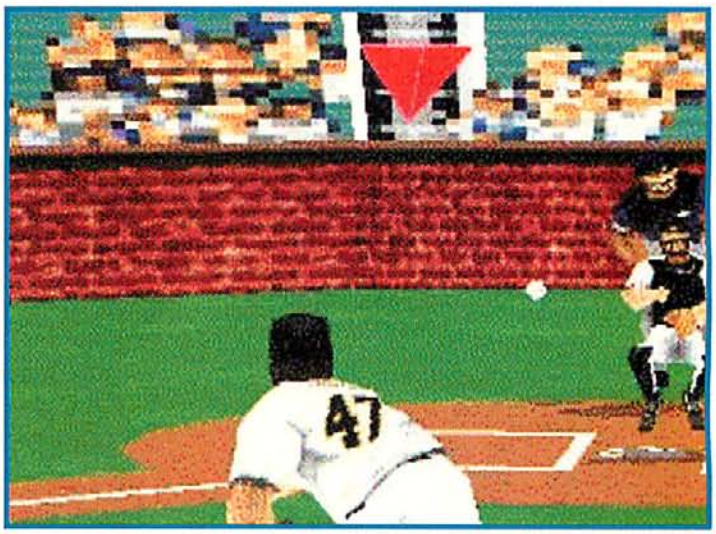
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Crowd Pleaser

TRIPLE PLAY 98 Ups the Ante for Arcade Play, But Realism Still Strikes Out

by Jim Gindin



PITCH OUT Don't let yourself get behind in the count—you'll pay with either a walk or a higher ERA.

When it comes to knowing the marketplace, EA Sports is tough to beat. Over the last few years, the folks in San Mateo, Calif., have compiled a series of action-oriented sports games that have dazzled the eyes and dominated the charts. Last year's TRIPLE PLAY 97 was no exception, and easily ranked as the best of the arcade-style baseball games. Now, in maybe the most competitive season ever, EA is attempting to hold onto the crown with a sequel.

TRIPLE PLAY 98 is a true EA sports game. Attention to visual detail is the EA hallmark, and this game pays attention. Players fill one-fourth of the screen in some camera angles, and, as EA leads the trend toward polygon-based figures, these players are beautifully detailed. Even at lower resolutions, you can read uniform numbers and the players' names across their backs. You can modify player height and weight, and even choose from two different styles of goatee. Touches like having infielders throw underhand when they're within a few feet of their target lend a nice quality of visual realism.

EA provides each major-league ballpark in great detail, including the Dome in Tampa Bay and the soon-to-be-constructed retractable-roof stadium in Arizona. You can play from several camera heights, either facing the pitcher or the batter. You can choose to play the game from a fielder's perspective as well. EA has built a flexible stadium world and gives you many ways to use it.

ON THE FIELD

Like most EA games, TRIPLE PLAY is geared for use with a four-button gamepad. The game centers around pitching, and pitchers are rated from 50–99 in one or more of eight available pitches. Unlike in many other games, these pitches are realistically depicted, even though the ratings don't translate well into performance. After selecting a pitch, you choose the general location and whether you want the pitch aimed inside or outside the strike zone. After throwing the pitch, you can guide it toward the plate. Obviously, you can't do this in real life, but this is becoming the norm for arcade baseball, and it gives you more of a feeling that you're affecting the result.

Pitching success seems almost random, except that throwing pitches down the middle of the plate without alteration is almost always rewarded with a stinging line drive straight into the outfield. I've found that mixing up pitches and keeping them down leads to lower scores. But getting behind in the count often leads to trouble—especially since I didn't throw a called strike even once, and most pitches not thrown to the center of the plate will be called balls.

On the field, you can choose to play with dark circles on the ground marking the point where the ball will hit. If you can field without them, you're a far better arcade ballplayer than I'll ever be. The camera angles don't provide the full trajectory of a hit ball, especially when it's launched near the foul lines. I've found fielding with the right or left fielder to be quite challenging, and doing anything with the first or third basemen downright impossible. The viewpoints don't give you enough time or control over the infielders in ground ball situations, making anything but a grounder right at the highlighted fielder an exercise in frustration.

It's also too easy to throw to the wrong base, and while the infielders do a good job covering for overthrows, little things like the pitcher covering first base on a ground ball to the right side aren't implemented properly. There's also no infield fly rule.

BAT MAN

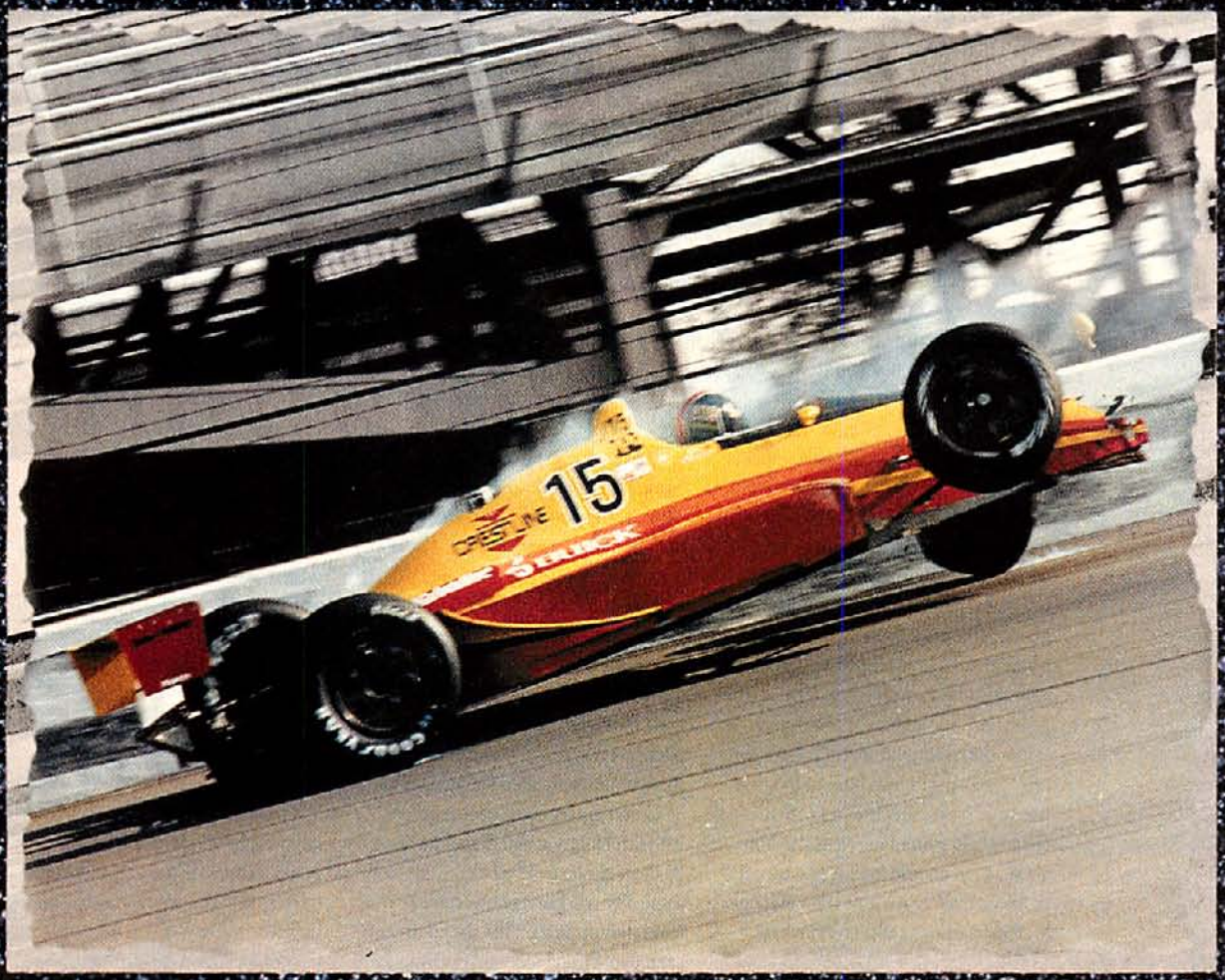
EA decided to continue its practice of implementing hitting without forcing the batter to choose where to swing the



Price: $54.95
Minimum System Requirements: P90, Windows 95, 16MB RAM, high-color capable 1MB PCI video card with DirectDraw support, 20MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, mouse, keyboard, sound card with DirectX support; supports Gravis gamepads and other joysticks.
Multiplayer Support: Modem, serial link (2–4 players on 2 computers, 1 CD per computer), Hotseat (2–4 players), LAN (2–4 players on 2 computers, 1 CD per computer).
Designer/Publisher: EA Sports
San Mateo, CA.
(800) 245-4525
www.easports.com
Reader Service #: 328

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bat. Until true 3D graphics exist, I think this is an excellent decision. Hitting in TRIPLE PLAY 98 is an exercise in timing. If you time your swing properly, and the ball is in the strike zone, you will make contact with the ball. The better the timing, the farther it travels. You can choose one of three buttons to start the swing. One hits normally, one hits for power (while sacrificing quality of contact), and one bunts. You can also choose the direction of contact and whether you're trying for a fly ball, line drive, or ground ball by moving the directional controller. In real baseball, you'd be penalized for trying to pull an outside fastball, but, like the pitching aftereffects, it helps the arcade feel of the game.



BATTER UP A successful batting average in TRIPLE PLAY is all a matter of timing. Get it just right, and you'll have a Ken Griffey Jr. kind of year.

Baserunning is not well designed, because the outfielders all have Raul Mondesi cannonlike arms, and your only real control is to push up or down on the game pad. Sometimes all the runners respond, and sometimes they don't. You often end up with two base runners on the same base. Needless to say, that doesn't help your offensive game. You also have to choose to slide and time it properly, making it a little more difficult to steal bases or to take an extra base.

STRIKE OUT

With all the detail put into gameplay, the rest of TRIPLE PLAY 98 suffers. You can manage a league of sorts, but it's very difficult to add or trade players. You can create 25 of your own players, but you can't really translate the ratings you're asked to enter into any sort of perspective.

The game also provides Arizona and Tampa Bay for individual game play. These teams will even hold an expansion draft from the free-agent pool. The pool is made up of relievers and utility players who are barely holding on to major-league jobs, however, which makes these two teams unusually bad. They can perform adequately in arcade mode, if you don't mind the computer AI switching pitchers every few pitches because of the strangely implemented fatigue factor.

Commentary comes from sessions with Jim Hughson and Buck Martinez. It's the requisite baseball cliché talk, with some nice pre-game notes on the home-team starting pitcher. But the comments are repetitive and random. For instance, you can slap a single on the first pitch and hear, "He really worked the count to get the pitch he wanted," as a reward.

Season play is possible, although it takes TRIPLE PLAY 98 about two hours to simulate a full season. The numbers aren't worth the wait, as there's little differentiation among players. While Ken Griffey Jr. can hit 50 home runs, teammates Rich Amaral and Joey Cora, who have 22 home runs between them in a combined 16 seasons of big-league experience, each reached the 30s in a single season. Most teams end up with about 300 home runs, well above the major-league record, during the course of a season. Backup players are hardly ever used, many going the entire season without playing.

Pitching is even stranger, with each team assigned an unchanging four-man rotation. The starters universally have records like 15-0 and 17-2 in their 40 starts, while all the relievers have horrendous records. There's always something happening in the ninth inning, so even the best closers have ERAs near 5.00. Norm Charlton, who is kind of in the middle among relievers, posted a 10.44 ERA despite 29 saves in 83 appearances. Each team has a middle reliever who has 25–35 decisions, mostly losses, and a lot of innings pitched.

This is not a game for those interested in statistical accuracy. Nor is it for those interested in in-game strategy. When playing single games against the computer, you can often change only the computer team's roster, not your own. TRIPLE PLAY 98 doesn't understand how to assign a fielder's choice, so you'll see lots of infield hits scored as outs. The game saves league statistics, but only creates leader lists for the 1996 real-life statistics in its database, so finding league leaders in your own leagues is next to impossible.

BOX SCORE

All in all, TRIPLE PLAY 98's graphics and gameplay should keep arcade fans happy, although some of the gameplay quirks may cause frustration. If you're interested in simulating baseball seasons, however, the lack of a reasonable statistics compiler and the problems with managing lineups make TRIPLE PLAY very difficult to recommend, even to those of you least interested in the numbers. This is a real step backward even from last year's version. And, of course, there's still the Home Run Derby, where you can set the opposing pitcher to use a "tornado-style" delivery. Now that's knowing the marketplace.

APPEAL: Baseball enthusiasts who like to play (rather than manage) the game.

PROS: Crisp, polygon-based players; attention to visual detail; entertaining arcade action.

CONS: As statistically accurate as a politician behind in the polls; difficult, if not impossible, to handle league simulation.

CG RATED

Just The Facts

TRIPLE PLAY 98 has a running series of baseball trivia facts scrolling through all game menus, which, in theory, is a nice touch. I found mistakes, however, in at least seven of these facts, including one reference to Reggie Jackson as the only man to hit three home runs in a World Series game (Babe Ruth's career is not that hard to research, if you're going to check that fact) and another reference that says the Florida Marlins began play in 1991, a year before they even participated in their expansion draft. This game's graphics are awesome—it's too bad they didn't have a better fact-checker.

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Developed for Windows® 95

HEROES OF THE GRIDIRON

CIRCLE READER SERVICE #249

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Let's Swing

In a Great Rookie Effort, Sierra's FPS: GOLF Debuts Near the Top of the Leaderboard

by Scott A. May

Not long after Sierra christened its FRONT PAGE SPORTS line, golf was supposedly near the top of the wish list for future titles. Several years down the road, it's finally happened. Fortunately, the resulting package turns out to have been worth the wait.

The driving force behind FPS: GOLF is Vance Cook, who is best known for his work on Access Software's WORLD CLASS LEADERBOARD and LINKS series. Cook's love of golf gives this simulation a distinct personality, and permeates its swing mechanics, intuitive interface, and ball flight dynamics. There's a unique tactile quality to gameplay that's readily apparent when you connect club to ball. In a word: realism.

THE HOLE TRUTH

The game ships with two professional 18-hole courses: the challenging Pete Dye Golf Club and Hawaii's scenic Prince Course. So far, add-on courses include Coeur d'Alene and Black Diamond Ranch. It also offers 12 types of play—the most of any golf sim yet—including team variations of medal, match, Stableford, skins, scramble, and best ball.

Graphics are photorealistic, and utilize a combination of digitized bitmaps, 3D-rendered objects, and texture-mapped polygonal terrain. Unlike most of its competition, the game uses polygonal golfers instead of video-captured images. Though they are less lifelike, the payoff comes with faster animation and a much wider range of motions (and emotions). The game looks great in standard SVGA-graphics resolution (640x480, 256 colors), but is downright stunning when bumped to 1024x768 and 64K color depth.

The game's biggest innovation is a new style of swing mechanics dubbed TrueSwing. Using the mouse as a virtual club, TrueSwing offers players real-time interactive control of backswing, power, and ball contact. Simply move the mouse backward to raise the club, and forward to strike. This technique feels natural and is easy to pick up, but like the real thing, it takes practice to master subtleties such as fades, draws, and spin (which is accomplished with sideways motion at the end of your swing).

To be fair, Maxis beat Sierra to the punch with its MouseSwing in SIMGOLF. But it was still a latent approach to interactivity, with several technical drawbacks. Put through a grueling 72-hole marathon, TrueSwing proves a rousing success, delivering tangible, hands-on control. Diehard mouse-clickers take heart—TrueSwing can be switched off in favor of the traditional triple-twitch swing meter.

Multiplayer modes include modem-to-modem, LAN, and Internet gaming (via Sierra's free online service, where up to 64 players can compete in a single tournament). Unusual options in player setup include variable scaling of shot distance and ball direction. This is not so much a cheat as a technique for helping beginners to improve their game. Another terrific option lets computer-controlled players actually learn from every stroke, ensuring tough competition for even the hardiest pro.

NICE VIEW, ROUGH LIE Here's a good example of FPS: GOLF's superb mix of graphic styles and 3D visual effects.



FORM FACTOR An intuitive interface offers precision adjustments of stance and club loft.





Price: $54.95
Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 60 (P90 recommended), Windows 95, 16MB RAM (32MB recommended), SVGA graphics, 25MB hard drive space (65MB recommended), 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), mouse; Win 95-compatible sound card. Modem, LAN, or ISP connection needed for multiplayer games.
Multiplayer Support: hot-seat (1–4 players, 1 CD per player), modem (2 players, 1 CD per player), LAN (1–8 players, 1 CD per player), Internet (1–64 players, 1 CD per player).
Designer: Vance Cook
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
Bellevue, WA
(800) 757-7707
www.sierra.com
Reader Service #: *329*

HOT LINKS

What's missing? Beyond a course architect—granted, Accolade's JACK NICKLAUS 4 has that feature sewn up—there's little fault to be found with FPS: GOLF. If I had to be picky, the following would be the game's biggest fault: Balls are nearly impossible to visually track following a hit. Sure, there's a ball-tracer option, and a drive window view, but a more dynamic ball tracker, similar to that in Interplay's VR GOLF, is sorely needed.

But overall, Sierra's first golf sim is a winner, with key features like TrueSwing elevating it above the fray in an increasingly crowded genre.

APPEAL: Golf nuts of all skill levels.

PROS: Superb graphics and intuitive interface; TrueSwing is the best alternative yet to traditional swing meter; multiplayer options well-implemented.

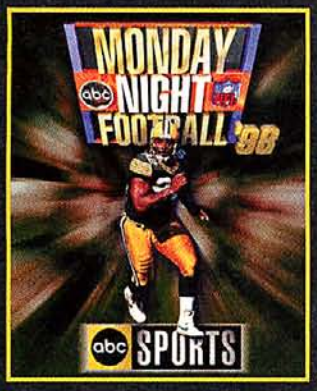
CONS: No course editor; balls can be difficult to track.

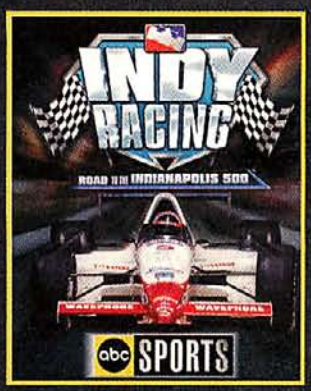
CG RATED ★★★★

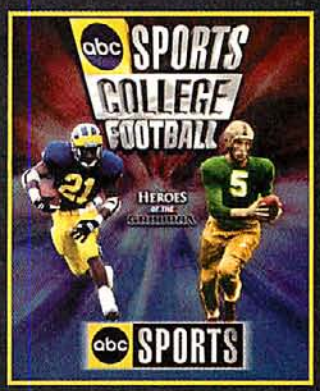
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- Register at www.abcinteractive.com
- Compete in qualification rounds.
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- 2 Finalists in each competition are flown to the ultimate on-site location: ABC's Monday Night Football '98 at SuperBowl XXXII® in San Diego, ABC Sports Indy Racing at the Indy 200™ at Walt Disney World® or ABC Sports College Football at The Rose Bowl® in Pasadena.

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Developed for Windows® 95

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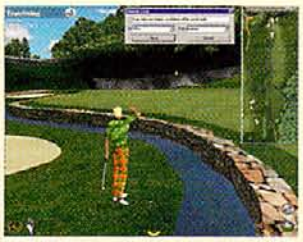
You love the game. You hate the game. You exalt when you knock your eight iron stiff, then blubber like a baby when you three-putt the hole. Ah, the beauty of TrueSwing™ by Front Page Sports®. With the handy assistance of your mouse, you can re-create the natural physics of your swing — good, bad and ugly. Hook your shot. Slice your shot. Smoke it straight down the fairway. It's all about concentration.



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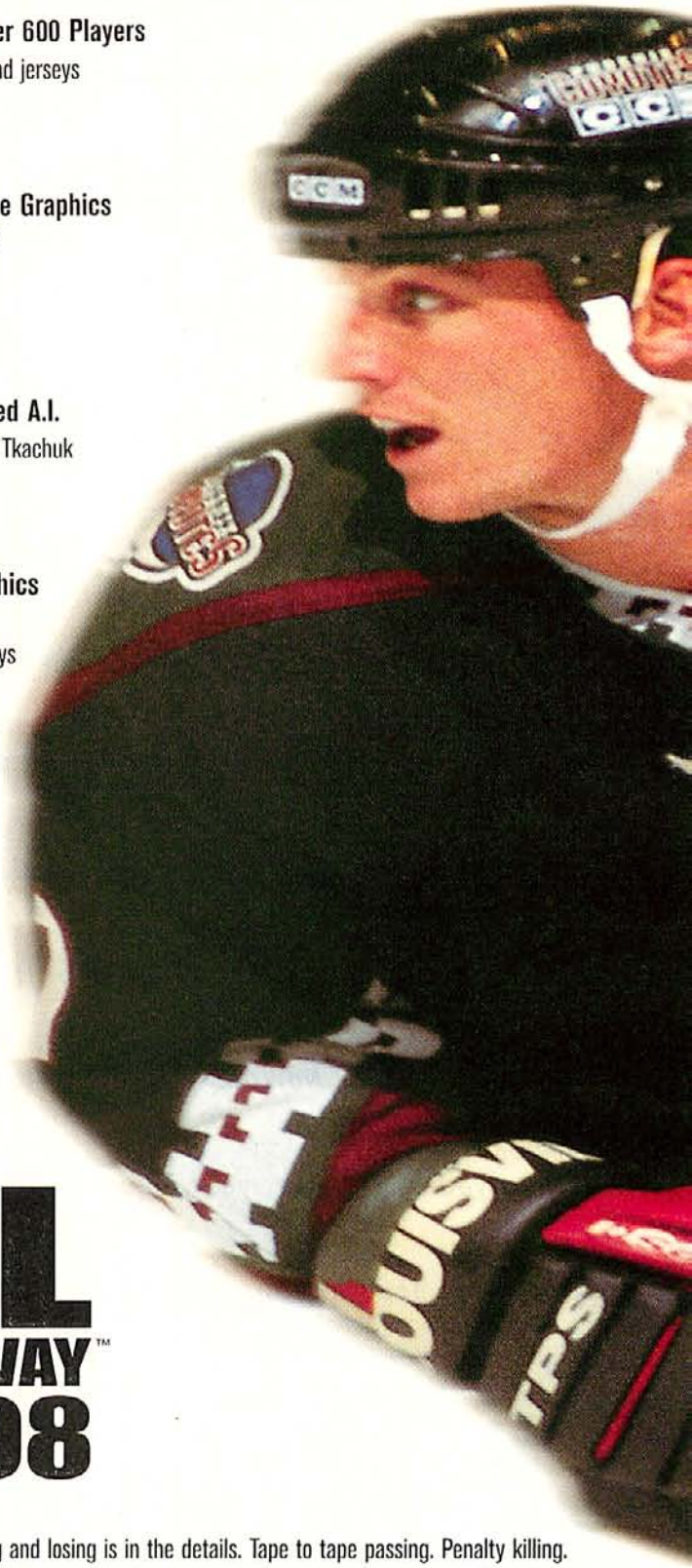


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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #157

★★★☆☆ **REVIEW • HOYLE POKER**



DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY

Ante Matter

by Charles Ardai

After HOYLE CASINO and HOYLE BLACKJACK, it was inevitable that Sierra would further milk the venerable Hoyle name with HOYLE POKER. No one should own all three, and probably not even two. But if poker is your game, and you've always wanted a spiffy computer version that features many of your favorite variations, HOYLE POKER mostly delivers the goods.



2D FOUR-FLUSHERS At least the stereotypical computer opponents play better than they banter.

POKER FACES

Of course, so do 20 other poker games published over the past dozen years, as do hundreds of shareware titles. What sets Sierra's retilling of this well-worked soil apart is its trademark slickness. From the TV-commercial-quality opening animation of dancing cards and poker chips to the impeccably laid-out interface and the breadth of gameplay choices, you know you're in good hands from the very beginning.

It's almost too slick, though; the high gloss seems intended to distract you from the basic fact that this is just a poker game. Also, poker is a multiplayer game, and the computer players you have to deal with here are extremely annoying, both because of their Central Casting appearance (the old lady in lace, the homeboy in a leather jacket, the southerner in string tie and goatee) and because of their puerile comments.

While you can turn the comments off, you can't easily replace the artificial opponents with human ones over the Internet, given Sierra's buggy link. The two dozen different poker variations, including Baseball, Omaha, and Cincinnati, give you a decent way to practice for your real-world games with friends, but how many hands of simulated poker can a person sit through? I wonder whether Sierra could publish a tic-tac-toe game under the Hoyle license and still get $25 for it? At this rate, we're sure to find out.

Price: $24.95
Format: Windows 95.
Multiplayer Support: Internet (1–7 players).
Publisher: Sierra On-Line, Inc.
Bellevue, WA
(800) 757-7707
www.sierra.com
Reader Service #: 330

APPEAL: Poker enthusiasts who found HOYLE CASINO tame.

PROS: Stylish visuals; dead-on sound effects; plenty of options.

CONS: Annoying AI; unreliable Internet competition.

CG RATED

★★☆☆☆ **REVIEW • GOLDEN NUGGET**



DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY

Iron Pyrite

by Charles Ardai

With all the assistance Virgin received from the actual Golden Nugget casino while producing this game, they should have been able to make it stand out from all the other casino games that have recently appeared.

Where they were successful is in the incidentals: For instance, the process of choosing which game to play feels more like walking through a real casino than in most competing titles. Placing a bet is a graphically rich (and needlessly complicated) affair. In addition to the usual spinning roulette wheels and rolling dice, there are card dealers who deal out and then pick up each hand of cards. There is also a storyline that plays out in FMV between rounds.



HOLY BAD SCRIPT, BATMAN! Adam West, trapped in a needless plotline, utters lines devoid of any intentional parody.

But the games are the usual games, without much of note to recommend them. In addition to roulette and craps, you have several variations on poker and blackjack, Keno and "Big Six," and a variety of slot machines. These are all games you've played before; here, they're no better and no worse than usual—and that's only as long as you turn off all the fancy animation before playing, since leaving it on slows down the gameplay intolerably.

Don't get me started on the paralyzingly awful FMV sequences, which star Adam (Batman) West, and contain lines like "Crime never folds its hand when justice is showing a pair of deuces!" Then there's the pointlessness of a computer game version of a slot machine. (You pull the handle. The wheels spin. That's it.)

If you have a hankering for simulated gambling, you could do worse than GOLDEN NUGGET. Just don't expect it to be any better than your average shareware casino title—at a higher price.

Price: $19.95
Format: Windows 95.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Publisher: Virgin
Irvine, CA
(800) 874-4607
www.vie.com
Reader Service #: 331

APPEAL: Did you see *Honeymoon in Vegas* and call your travel agent the next day?

PROS: Authentic Vegas sets and sounds give these very bland games a little flavor.

CONS: Gameplay slow with animation on, boring otherwise; cinematic sequences and dopey plot are almost beneath criticism.

CG RATED

Some Say Role Playing Is Dead....




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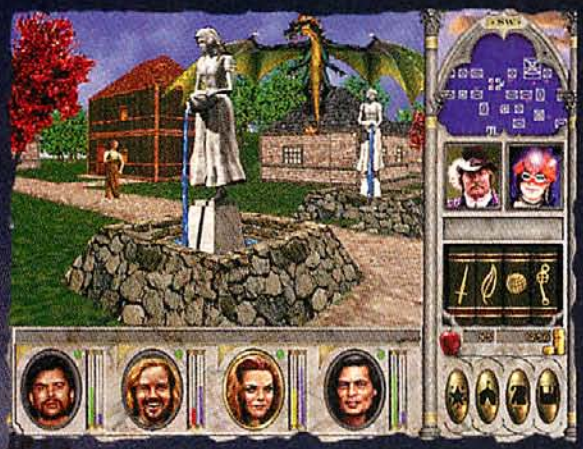
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RATING PENDING RP

CGW CHOICE

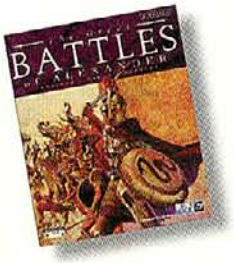
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Truly Great

I-Magic Charges With the Best Ancients Game Yet

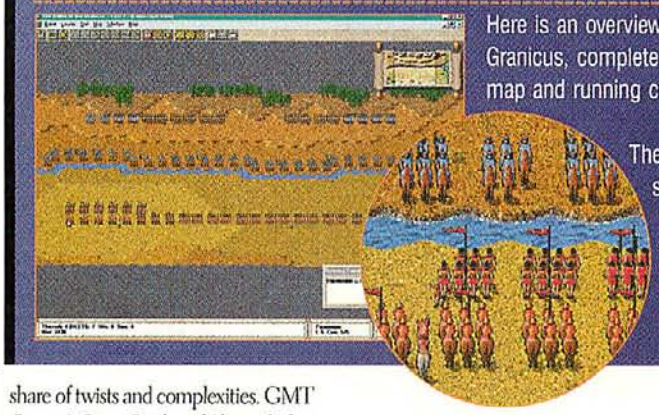
by Jim Cobb

Computer games that cover ancient tactical warfare have fallen victims to the topic's seeming simplicity: Basically, you just line 'em up and charge. Yet anyone who has read of Caesar's exploits in Gaul or the campaigns of Alexander the Great knows that ancient warfare had its share of twists and complexities. GMT Games' *Great Battles of Alexander* has always been the foremost game in capturing the many nuances of command control and combined arms in ancient warfare. So, instead of reinventing the chariot wheel, Interactive Magic brought the acclaimed boardgame to the PC. In fact, Interactive Magic was so happy with the results that the company is already hard at work on GREAT BATTLES games covering Hannibal and Julius Caesar. After playing ALEX, there's a good chance you'll be as happy with the results as I-Magic Founder "Wild Bill" Stealey himself.



Price: $49.95
Minimum System Requirements: 486DX/100 (Pentium 100 or better *strongly* recommended), Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 51MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports Win 95-compatible sound cards.
Multiplayer Support: Modem, LAN, or Internet (1–2 players).
Design: Erudite Software with Mark Herman and Gene Billingsley
Original Boardgame Design: Mark Herman and Richard Berg
Publisher: Interactive Magic Research Triangle Park, NC (800) 789-1534
www.imagicgames.com
Reader Service #: 332

A MERE SPEAR'S THROW AWAY



Here is an overview of the battle of Granicus, complete with strategic map and running commentary.

The close-up view shows Alexander and the troops he directly commands near the famous river.

IT'S YOUR MOVE—MAYBE

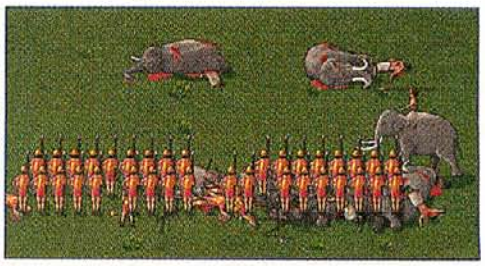
At the core of ALEX are leaders, who have two facets: initiative and command range. The computer checks to see which commander goes first, with the probabilities weighted by each leader's initiative. The activated leader then issues a number of orders (equal to his initiative) to the troops that are in his command range.

In a typical phased-movement game, the initiative would then pass to the other side. In ALEX, however, whenever a leader has finished, the computer checks to see if that leader gains *momentum*. Momentum allows the same leader to keep going for one or two more phases, rather than end his turn. Thus, it's possible for the Macedonians, since their leaders have relatively high initiative, to overwhelm their enemies and consolidate positions quickly, before the other side has a chance to react. Also, it doesn't hurt that Alex can *trump* enemy initiative attempts twice per game—guess that's why they call him Alexander the Great.

A command can encompass more than one action. One command can allow an unit to move, pivot, fire missiles, and target an enemy for shock. To rally, restore a unit's cohesion, or move a leader, your active leader must spend a command for each. Obviously, you must coordinate commands with each leader's initiative rating and unit status, or you'll suffer splintered control. Knowing when to use a command to maintain control is as important as attacking.

ALEX has ten different types of units representing infantry, cavalry, and auxiliaries. Each unit has a troop quality (TQ), cohesion hit number, size, and movement points, all varying by type and nationality. TQ is simply a measure of training and weapons, while cohesion hits are the amount of damage a unit can take before being routed. Size is measured in increments of 70–100 men. Movement points are expended per terrain type and zones of control.

If managing all of these factors reminds you why you gave up boardgaming, never fear: ALEX presents them all painlessly. The values of selected units, active leaders, and units the cursor is over are represented in a bar below the map. A leader's command range shows on the map, as does the area in which an unit may move. This area is diminished as the unit moves or pivots. To designate shock combat, the cursor turns into a sword over a possible target. Missile fire is designated by clicking on the appropriate icon and getting a spear cursor over highlighted targets. An optional window gives a running commentary of cohesion



HURRY, CLOSE THE TRUNK! Elephant charges are common, and include pachyderm trumpeting and the screams of men trying to escape.

effects of movement and missile fire received during movement. A small overview map gives the big picture even if the game is played in the closest of three possible views. Being able to rotate the map 180 degrees greatly aids your plotting of movement and tactics.

COHESIVE WARFARE

Combat is divided into missile and shock action. Missile-equipped units can fire anytime during movement at a range of one or two hexes; the computer handles defensive fire automatically. Although missile fire is the only way to kill leaders, it doesn't cause much damage and primarily softens up a target for shock combat. The real damage is done by shock, performed after a leader is finished. A unit's shock value is a function of its weapons (superiority), facing relative to its target (clash of spears), TQ, size, and terrain.

Combat results aren't just dead bodies; hits are taken as unit cohesion losses. When accumulated hits equal one less than the unit's TQ, the computer "rolls a die" and the unit is routed if the roll is equal to or larger than the TQ. (Cohesion hits are also taken for moving over certain terrain.) Each unit can be rallied once per game. Unrallied units leave the field and count against that side's victory level.

Combat animation is terrific, with weapons jabbing, riderless horses bolting, and bodies falling or drifting down a river. The game automatically zooms to close-up for gory details. Routed units flee, victors advance, and a battle window describes results in terms of cohesion hits. The key to tactical success is maintaining a cohesive line while applying pressure at the enemy's weak points. The Macedonian unity of command gives them an advantage in this, although the AI's play for either side is more than adequate. Unlike many phased-based games, ALEX works well over modem and Internet.

The 10 battles of ALEX range from Chaeronea (with Alexander as a lieutenant to his father) to his last battle at Hydaspes in India. In most battles, the Macedonians win by routing the enemy or killing Darius, the Persian commander, within ten turns. By playing the other side, victory can be had by staving off defeat, killing Alexander, or routing the Macedonians. Major exceptions to this format are the unlimited slaughters of Granicus and Hydaspes. A campaign game gives a player ten rounds to match or better Alexander's world conquest by fighting all ten battles, garrisoning provinces, and abstractly subjugating Egypt and Persia.

CHIPPED SPEARPOINT

ALEX's primary problem is that the graphics slow down gameplay. On a P150 with 16MB of RAM, a normal (51MB) install rivals the speed of molasses while a full install (131MB) is playable but still annoyingly slow. Turning off options helps, but....

Historically, Alexander led charges and tried to duel his counterparts. Giving leaders combat modifiers when they are personally involved in combat would be easy to do. Finally, a fog-of-war option is needed. All troop and leader values can be gained from the board and the manual, giving the player more information than a historical commander had. Hiding or changing some values would add replay value.

Petty as these criticisms may seem, these shortcomings detract from an otherwise flawless product. The seamless interface, useful graphics, great history, and well-written and thorough manual make ALEX simply the best-ever ancients system. It's also one of the most innovative strategy games about any era.



DISMEMBERING YOU Even though it's phased combat, ALEX is plenty bloody. Note the severed arm floating down the river.

CLASH OF SPEARS (and Unit Types)



Elephants They paralyze cavalry and have good missile and shock value. However, when they rampage (and they will), they inflict casualties on friend and foe alike until killed.

Chariots Obsolete for 700 years by Alexander the Great's era, chariots are hard to maneuver, limited to certain terrain, and cannot be rallied; perfect infantry targets.

Heavy Cavalry Peculiar to the Macedonians during the ancient period, heavy cavalry has tremendous shock values. All cavalry can perform an "orderly withdrawal" from most units by passing a TQ check.

Double Phalanx These represent large disciplined Greek infantry units. They cover two hexes and pivot like a gate. Phalanxes are the only units that can about face,



and their high TQ values count double for rout purposes. These are the defensive backbone and offensive hammer of Alexander's army.

Skirmishers These are nimble little missile units, such as archers and slingers. With the exception of the two Macedonian Agrianian units, they cannot indulge in shock combat. You move them up, fire, and pray they can get back. Skirmishers can perform an orderly withdrawal from heavy infantry.

Oxybele These long-range bolt throwers represent the only artillery in the game. Oxybele may fire without expending a command, and are often devastating.

APPEAL: Any gamer remotely interested in ancients, or who just wants a great strategy game.

PROS: An elegant interface and rich, accessible combat system. Good historical accuracy and flavor, with a nice campaign mode and tough AI. The best ancients game yet on the computer.

CONS: Slow engine; no leader vs. leader duels; where's the fog-of-war option?

CG RATED

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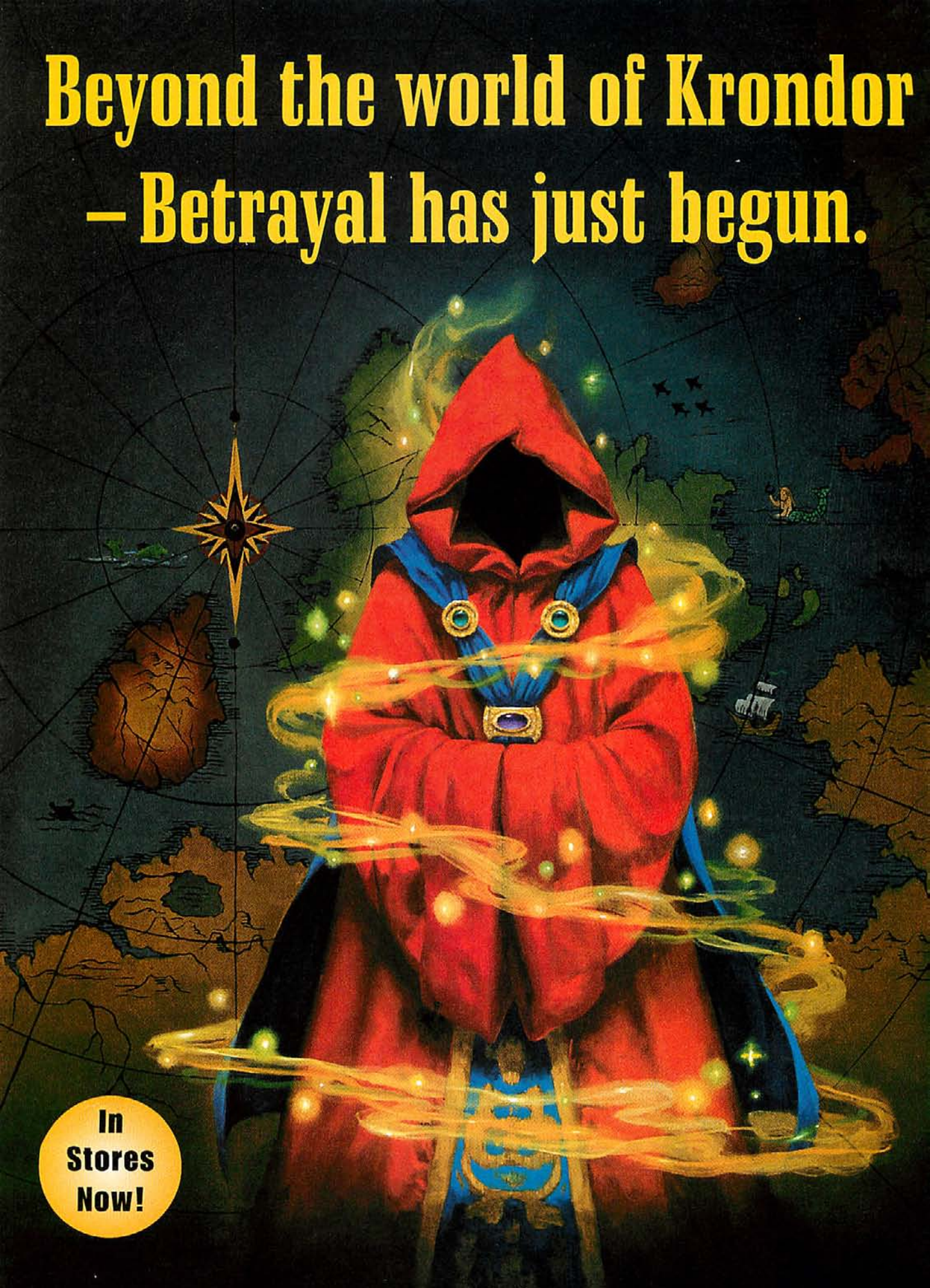
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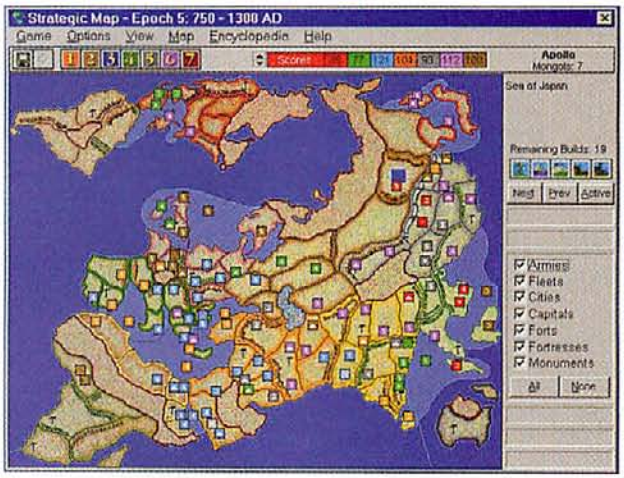
CIRCLE READER SERVICE #155

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Rise & Fall

AH Fails To Make History With Its Latest Boardgame Conversion

by Bob Proctor

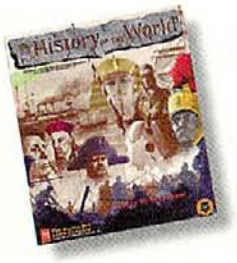


HISTORIC OVERVIEW While it's too small to show terrain features, the strategic map does show units and has all the controls needed to play the game. Here in Epoch five, the Mongols are deciding whether to take China or go for Europe. Notice how little has happened in the New World.

History of the World is one of the all-time great multiplayer boardgames. Its premise is to take 56 of the greatest empires in history, divide them chronologically into seven Epochs of eight empires each, and let each player play one empire in each Epoch. When they're all done, the one with the most points wins. While the premise has classic simplicity, the greatness is in the details. The flow of play requires many small decisions, each of which will affect at least one other player. This promotes interaction. There is an inevitable progression from imagined injuries to small paybacks followed by hurt feelings, implacable grudges, and wholesale back-stabbing. While those who feel out of the running attempt to settle old scores, the middle of the pack campaign to "get the leader," and the leader tries to convince everyone that he or she is not the *real* threat. Great stuff.

Avalon Hill seems to feel that HISTORY, like its other boardgame conversions, must be an accurate implementation that lets you learn to play or practice strategies. The assumption is that you will be playing the boardgame in the future; indeed, that you would *prefer* to be playing the boardgame. Playing a good game with a group of friends around the table *can* be one of the best experiences in gaming. But I also believe that playing a good game with a group of friends *over the network* can be one of the best experiences in gaming. So, why isn't a company that produces some of the best multiplayer games in the world trying to convert them into the best multiplayer *computer* games?

HISTORY has no provision for network or modem play, and in 1997, this is inexcusable for a multiplayer game. Hotseat play may work for two gamers, but I can't see it for six or seven. To be fair, email play *does* work, though you lose the spontaneity and passion that happen when all players are simultaneously engaged.



Price: $59.95
Minimum System Requirements: 486-33, Windows 3.1 or better, 8MB RAM, minimal hard drive space, VESA 1.2 compliant SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports Windows-compatible sound cards.
Multiplayer support: 1–7 players, hot seat or email.
Developer: Colorado Computer Creations
Original Boardgame Design: Ragnar Brothers
Publisher: The Avalon Hill Game Company
Baltimore, MD
(800) 999-3222
www.avalonhill.com
Reader Service #: 335



WINDOWS TO THE PAST During play you will have several windows open. The largest is the map; smaller ones show the current empire in play, the current event in play, and a thumbnail map that can be used to jump anywhere on the big map.

I CAME, I SAW, I FLASHED IN THE PAN

HISTORY has some good things going for it. It is an accurate re-creation of the popular boardgame. The graphics are colorful and functional, with large, easy to read maps. The game plays very quickly and easily. In fact, with a fast Pentium system you can play a game versus six computer-controlled players in less than an hour on the fastest setting! This is a *lot* faster than any group of seven humans could play, for the obvious reason: No chitchat, negotiation, or politics is going on. Afterward, you'll have only the foggiest notion of why the final standings turned out the way they did. This reveals a second reason for the quick play and another problem with the design. You're not getting any information about the other players except their score. Now, it's certainly possible to select a slower rate of play and watch

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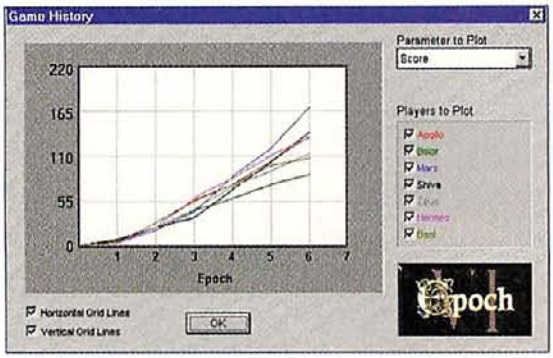
RATING PENDING RP

Designed for Microsoft® Windows®95

TSR

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #076



EPOCH EVALUATION There are a few reports you can summon about the game in progress. Here's a line chart showing how scores have fluctuated epoch by epoch.

carefully to see where the computer players attack and what event cards they play, but what's completely missing are the details of scoring.

Let me briefly explain scoring. The map of the world is divided into 13 areas and each is worth 0–4 points. This value can change from epoch to epoch as some areas (such as North America) become more important and others (like the Middle East) become less so. At the end of each of your turns, you score the value of each area if you occupy at least one Land in it. This is called having a Presence. If you occupy more Lands than any other player (but at least three), then you Dominate the area and score double. If you occupy every Land in the area then you Control it and score triple. Some Lands are resource-rich and for every pair of these you occupy, you can build a Monument. Monuments, Cities, and Seas under your control add more points to the total.

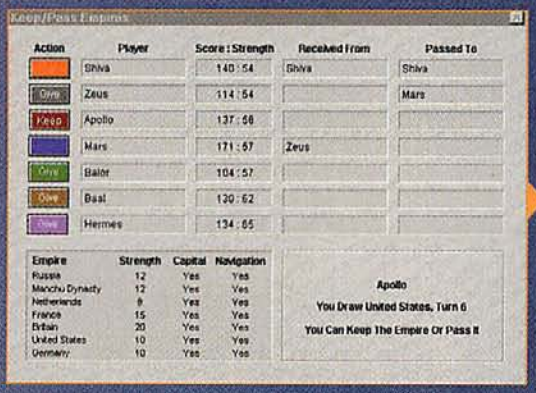
DATA AT YOUR FINGERTIPS...NOT!

In the boardgame, scores are counted out loud and all players at the table are aware of the details. The computer, of course, is great at handling all the bookkeeping—but hiding the mechanics is one thing, and hiding the results is another. You will find, for example, that the Blue player suddenly has 30 more points than you; until you become very familiar with the scoring system, you will be hard put to know where those points are coming from. Knowing, for example, that Blue is getting six points per turn for Domination of India is critical information to the decision making process that elevates good HISTORY players to the top. The game really needs a summary report at the end of each player-turn that shows how each scored.

Even better would be to have an Advisor that actually teaches you something about the game and the scoring system. Instead, we get an inane little window that pops up to confirm the event card you've just selected or to tell you to retreat a unit; in effect, just a glorified information box. There are several bugs in these routines, as the Advisor will sometimes pop up when other players are playing.

In the end, HISTORY OF THE WORLD is both a good game and a disappointment. It's challenging, and a good tool for the next boardgame tournament or casual session around the dining room table. Still, you can't help but wonder why this wasn't turned into a killer network game.

FORGE A LASTING EMPIRE THROUGH PLAY BALANCE



MINOR POWERS NEED NOT APPLY

At the beginning of each epoch, empires are assigned. Here Apollo has drawn the United States, a minor empire in 19th-century terms, and can either keep it or pass it to someone without an empire. Mars (blue) is 30 points ahead of all other players and would be a good candidate except that he has already been given an empire. Looks like Hermes (purple) gets it.

HISTORY OF THE WORLD is not an easy game to win. Trying to get out in front and stay there almost never succeeds. Instead, think like a bicycle sprint racer in the Olympics. In the early laps, position is entirely unimportant, and as you get close to the last lap, being in front is actually a disadvantage!

This is due partly to the "get the leader" syndrome but also to a clever design for deciding which player will play which empire. Every empire has a strength rating that is the number of armies brought into play. The numbers reflect how powerful or large the historical empire was and ranges from 4–25 (the Romans). Each player keeps a cumulative total of the strength of all the empires over the course of the game and this total determines the order for drawing empires in each epoch. The lowest total goes first and this is an advantage because you can either keep the empire or pass it to any player that does not have one yet. So if you draw the Romans in Epoch three, you should keep it. If you draw the Celts instead (strength 8), you should pass it.

Who would you pass it to? Probably the leader after two epochs—unless that happened to be the player who drew the Persians. This is because the Persians are the largest empire in Epoch two (strength 15) and play last while the Celts go first in Epoch three. So this player would still occupy all of the lands from Epoch two, could add a few more in Northern Europe with the Celts, and then score all of them again! Such are the intricacies of HISTORY.

APPEAL: Devotees of the boardgame, or light strategy enthusiasts.

PROS: Colorful graphics; snappy performance; competent AI; faithful to the original.

CONS: Minimal multiplayer interaction and too much hidden information; a good game that should have been better.

CG RATED

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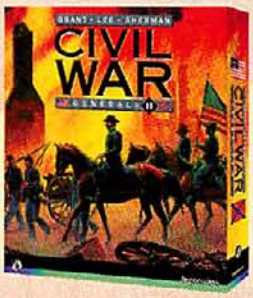


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RATING PENDING RP



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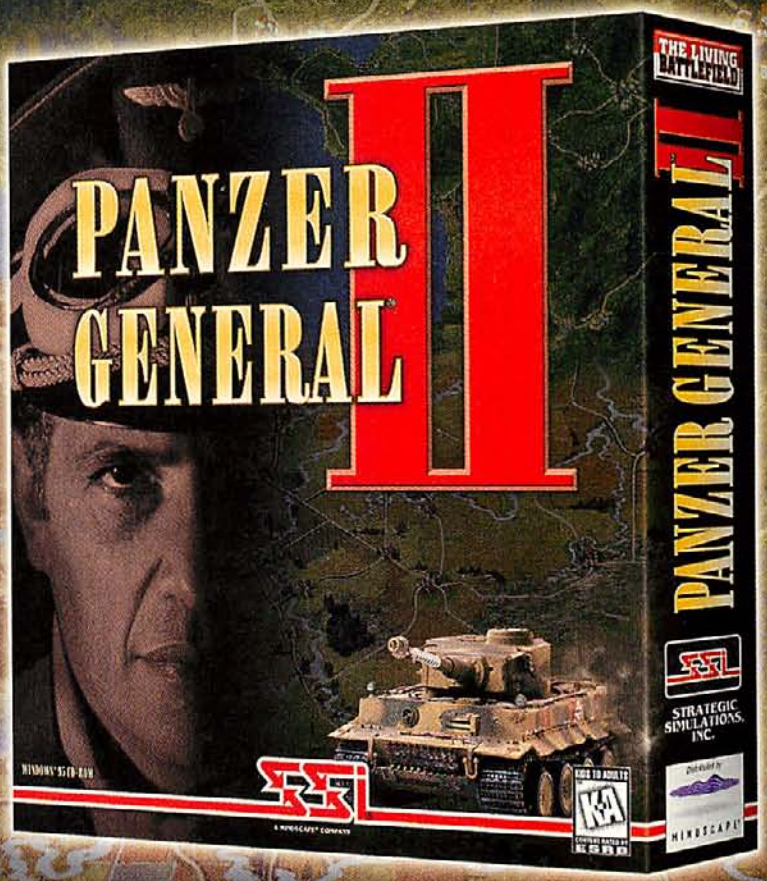
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Elements: New

[Centauri Galaxy]

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Ex Extinction .0149	**Su** Suffocation .002					
Re Rebellion .881	**It** Intellect .999	**Gm** Global Maps .703	**Mp** Multiplayer .1005	**Sv** Survival .703	**Tc** Tactics .0202	**Ad** Adrenalin .299
Cm Combat .03	**Sa** Sabotage .011	**Ct** Construction 0.080	**Ev** Evacuation .302	**An** Anxiety .0408	**Cd** Command .105	**S E** Seismic Eva .505
M Morale .171	**Fi** Fire .189	**Me** Meteor .52	**Vc** Volcano .905	**Wr** Wreckage .408	**Cnf** Confrontation .002	**Ms** Missions .0849

Element of Surprise Element of Danger Element of Destruction Element of Disaster







Dynamix

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lg unger 03	Mi Mining .091	Di Discovery .081	Rs Research .032	Dn Desperation .217	Bc Balance .1003	Dn Day and Night .055
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Heroic Encore

CG CHOICE

Get Ready for More Addictive Strategy Gameplay From New World Computing

by Elliott Chin

If ever there was a game that deserved to be labeled an addictive substance, HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC II would be it. At the height of my HEROES II-binge, I could never get enough of it and, in fact, I played it so much that my girlfriend once threatened to throw the disk away. Sadly, after I finished both campaigns in the original game, there was nothing left to do in the HEROES II world, and I was forced to play other games. But thanks to New World's HEROES II expansion set, PRICE OF LOYALTY, I've got an excuse to boot up my favorite turn-based strategy game again and relive my addiction.



NEW HORIZONS Cyberlore has outdone itself with this Heroes II expansion set, adding four new campaigns, new artifacts, and new structures (like the barrier at top).

A SWEET DRUG

As I played the expansion set, I remembered why HEROES II was so addictive. You always want to play that one last turn, and because you get so lost in the many things to do, you never realize that your one last turn has turned into two hours of gameplay (until it's too late, of course). In THE PRICE OF LOYALTY, this is ever more the case, especially since there are four new campaigns that are much more challenging than the originals. There are two short campaigns, composed of four scenarios each, and two longer campaigns, which have eight scenarios apiece.

The campaigns are as well designed as the originals, and have a logical progression of connected missions. In one of the missions, you have to shepherd a shipwrecked knight back to his home. You start out with the lone knight, and have to fight your way through a hostile island to capture a shipbuilding town. In the next scenario, you're actually sailing through an archipelago on your way home. In another scenario, you arrive home to a civil war, in which you have to choose sides.

There is a good mix of scenarios in all of the campaigns, as well. In some, you have to build a typical empire, extensively explore your environment, amass troops, and conquer the enemy. In others, you have to capture a town or retrieve an artifact while being timed. Some scenarios are built like mazes, with time enough only to explore one of the several possible routes through them. The addition of two new structures to the game—tents and barriers—aids in the more clever scenario design. In the expansion scenarios, magic colored barriers block certain areas. To break through them, you have to find the corresponding tent, usually located on the other side of the map, where you are given a password that will dissipate the barrier. The idea isn't bad, but in some scenarios, the barriers are superfluous, and act as tedious impediments to nothing more than a store of gold or resources.

EXTRA GOODIES

In addition to the tents and barriers, Cyberlore (the developers) has added a slew of new artifacts, several new heroes, and new structures. There are now structures on the map for recruiting elementals and even ghosts (potentially game unbalancing, but they so rarely occur that they hardly impair the balance of a scenario). The alchemist's hut, missing from HEROES II, is here, allowing unlucky heroes to rid themselves of cursed items like the Fizbin of Misfortune. I didn't take much notice of the new heroes, except in those scenarios where one was a central character who could not be lost (as in the knight lost at sea). Some of the new artifacts are garden-variety magic items that add bonuses to attack or spell power, but some, like the suit of Anduran, are great. This artifact is actually a combination of three lesser artifacts (all powerful in their own right) that conveys additional bonuses and spellcasting ability.

Though the multiplayer problems from HEROES II are still there (such as a lack of simultaneous turns, and the inability to view your territory when it is not your turn), the expansion disk is pure, classic HEROES fun. If you are a strategy fan, I would heartily recommend THE PRICE OF LOYALTY.



Price: $29.95
Minimum System Requirements: 486/66, 8MB RAM, 5MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive, DOS 5.0 or Win95, SVGA-graphics card, mouse; supports all major sound cards.
Multiplayer Support: Modem, serial link (2 players), Hotseat, LAN, Internet (2–6 players).
Designer: Cyberlore
Publisher: New World Computing/3DO
Woodland Hills, CA
(800) 325-8898
www.nwcomputing.com
Reader Service #: 336

APPEAL: Anyone who likes strategy games; role-players who want to try some strategy.

PROS: All the great HEROES II gameplay; well-done new campaigns and scenarios; some cool new artifacts and structures.

CONS: The same multiplayer faults from HEROES II.

CG RATED ★★★★★

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"The humor is sharp, the graphics are well-composed, and the gameplay is intelligent without being dull."

- GameSpot (June '97)



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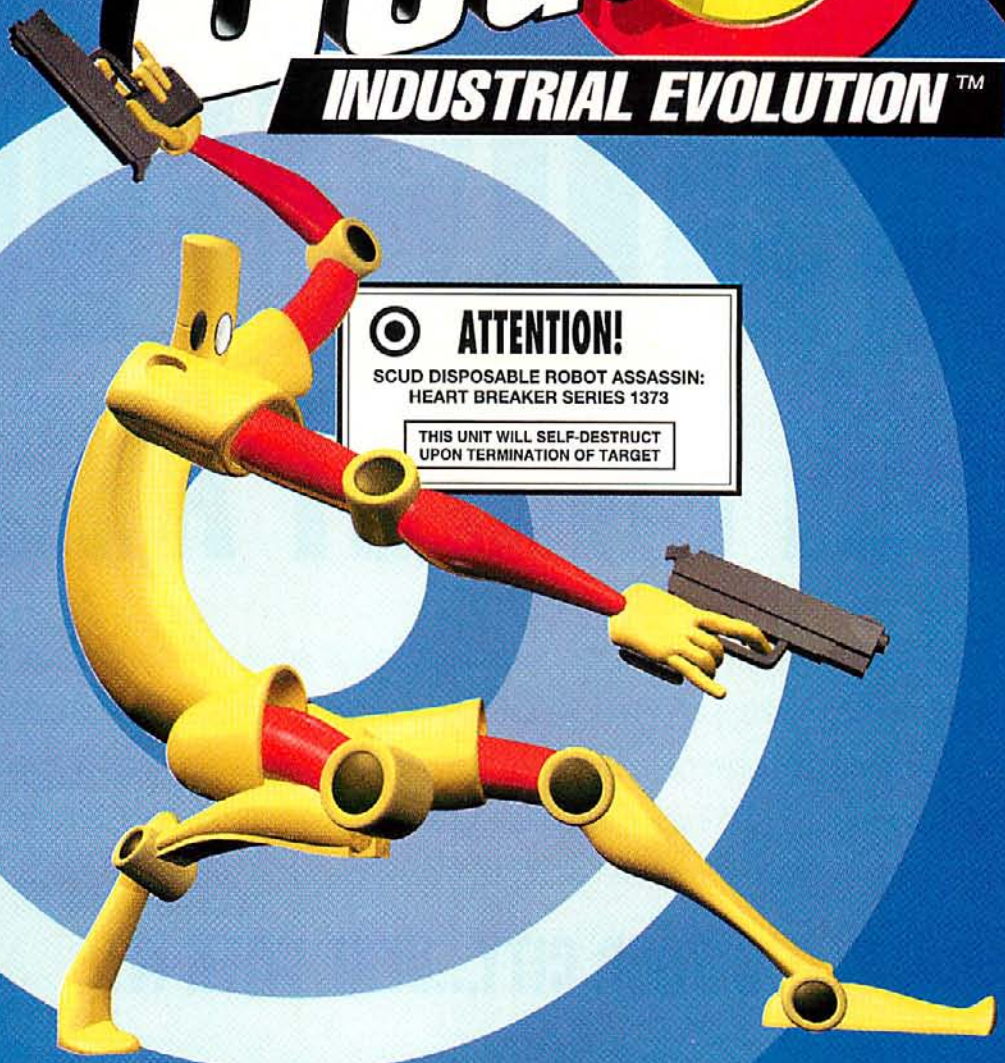


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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #374

Leave It to Riva

Return to the Land of Traditional CRPGs in Sirtech's SHADOWS OVER RIVA



SHADOWS OVER RIVA is the third entry in Sirtech's REALMS OF ARKANIA series, and the conclusion of the *Northlands Trilogy*. Of course, you don't need to have played either of the two previous games (BLADE OF DESTINY and STAR TRAIL) to play this one. Like its predecessors, RIVA is a stand-alone product, equally playable if you start a new team or if you bring your favorites over from STAR TRAIL.

While some changes have been made to the ARKANIA model, RIVA still uses basically the same engine and mechanics as before. Much will be familiar to those who have played any of the earlier games. The biggest difference is the size of the game world, which, in some ways, is smaller. There are still plenty of places to visit and dungeons to explore, but everything happens in and around the town of Riva. No long tramps through the countryside, worrying about starvation or disease. No need to visit multiple towns and run all over to find the right person to talk to.

The magic word is *convenience*, and it has made the game much more playable. By reducing the world to this one particular spot, redundancy is eliminated, and while the game itself is large, it doesn't become boring. That's usually a problem with large-scale RPGs: After awhile, everything become repetitious. This is one flaw RIVA doesn't have.

GO QUEST, YOUNG MAN

So what are you doing in RIVA? At the start, all you know is that something is not right here, and it's up to your party of characters to find out what's going on. The beginning of the game is a bit vague, and it remains that way for awhile. After a time, however, that changes, and the party's actions become more directed by various people and groups.

It gives the game an odd feel, going from poking around looking for something to do to riding the Quest Express. On the other hand, just about everything you have to accomplish is related in some way to the main plotline, which makes for tighter construction.

The game really starts with your party, and here you have four choices. The first is to bring over your group from STAR TRAIL. They will transfer relatively intact, though some items may not make it across.

The second choice is to go with the characters already created beforehand, who are actually in the party when the game begins in the Travia Temple. They are a reasonably decent bunch, and you can probably finish the game with them.

The final two possibilities are to create your own characters, either completely by hand or by letting the computer do it for you. Using computer generation, you simply pick the class you want and let the software do all the rolls and skill/spell point allocations.

To do it all yourself, you first go through a series of die rolls for the character stats until you have what you want, then do all the point distributions. Naturally, this is time-consuming, but is well worth the effort; you get the best characters this way, whatever their class.

LEVEL UP

Because the opposition will be tough, any character under sixth level — created or transferred — automatically goes through several level increases when added to the party. Brand-new ones thus get five free level increases right at the start. This holds true throughout the game: If you decide to drop someone from your party and replace him with someone new, the replacement also gets the increases when he joins up.

You need to make the most of these free increases. While there is much to do in the game, experience is on the cheap side. Very likely, your characters

> **"SHADOWS OVER RIVA is manna for a CRPG-starved gaming public."**



PARTY OF SIX Don't travel alone. You can create new characters for RIVA, or you can carry over your party from STAR TRAIL or WIZARDRY GOLD.



DRAGON ME DOWN The world of RIVA is full of dangers—don't go outside or underground until you're prepared to do battle with critters of all shapes and sizes.



FEELIN' HEXY RIVA's combat system is turn-based, and switches you into a third-person, overhead perspective.

will only be about ninth level at the end, so how you set up your group at the start is very important.

The town of Riva itself is safe to walk around in, at least until your party is framed for murder. Then walking the streets is a bit chancy, as you might be attacked by guards. Until that point, though, you don't have to worry about hostile encounters.

Outside of town is another matter. Whether you're in the tiny wilderness area past the gates or a dungeon, you can expect to meet any number of unfriendly critters. Sometimes, it's possible to avoid immediate combat, either by a bribe or by being stealthy (or even, on occasion, by running away). When you can't do that, or if your bloodlust is up and you want to fight, combat begins.

Fighting is turn-based, tactical combat. Who goes when is determined by hidden initiative rolls. It might be someone on your side or it might be an opponent. The view changes from a first-person perspective to overhead, with all combatants displayed individually. The floor is marked off in squares, for calculating movement, and attack lines for spells and missiles.

On a character's turn, he or she has a number of choices: move, attack, cast a spell, use an item (must be in hand), switch weapons, and so on. The game waits until you've decided what to do and have actually done it before going on to the next participant. This is good, as you have time at the start to plan out a strategy for the fight. And, if you're in over your head, or your party is getting creamed by the opposition, you don't have to wait for the inevitable; you can restore to a previous save in the middle of combat.

MY OLD SCHOOL

While it doesn't feature super-high-res art, the game's graphics are adequate (except for many of the character faces, which could have used some work).

The two best points about RIVA are having a full party of characters and turn-based combat. We have not had either of those features in a CRPG since THUNDERSCAPE, two years ago. In fact, there haven't been many CRPGs at all in recent times—and those that did come out were all of the solo-adventurer, real-time combat variety. Those are all well and good, but it gets to be a bit much after awhile. It was a great joy to play again in the traditional mode of CRPGs.

The game ran smoothly and without problems on my 486/66. It's not surprising, as the minimum computer listed is a 486/33. Not something you come across too often in these days of "Pentium supermachine required."

BAD TIDINGS

For all its good points, however, RIVA is not without some flaws. In the Minor Idiocy Department, there is one place in the Magician's Tower where you have to leave behind one member of your party. This unfortunate soul thus loses out on all the experience available on the upper levels. There is absolutely no reason for this to be in the game.

Far worse, though, is the endgame. First, you go into it with nothing. No weapons, no armor, no potions, nada. You do get to pick up some third-rate stuff along the way to the big battle, but none of that compares with what you had to leave behind. The whole point of acquiring Neat Items, or even just good ordinary equipment, is to prepare yourself for the inevitable Foozle encounter at the conclusion. For the toughest fight in the game, you want the best possible weapons and armor, not cheap substitutes of little value.

And the Queen *is* tough. She hits multiple opponents simultaneously for serious damage, and she can cast spells. With junk for equipment, your fighters are reduced to being a buffer for the mages, who do the actual work of killing her off with spells.

It doesn't get better afterward. When the party returns to Riva, the god Rohal appears to them and says, in so many words: "Ya done good. But no one's going to remember what's happened. So you're still wanted for murder, and you better get out of town while you can."

This is not a great ending. It isn't even satisfactory, particularly when you consider this is a series conclusion. Slinking out of town branded as cutthroats and murderers is not exactly in the heroic tradition. It is, unfortunately, in the tradition of far too many game designers. Perhaps, by the time they finish a game, designers are too mentally exhausted to come up with something worthwhile. I personally believe they should start with the end of a game and work their way to the front. It just might make getting to the conclusion more rewarding for gamers.

RIVA is yet another of those products that aggravate me more than outright turkeys: It is the game with many good features and a large flaw that takes the edge off enjoyment. *Arggh!!* But, for all that, SHADOWS OVER RIVA is still manna for a CRPG-starved gaming public. If you can live with (or overlook) the downbeat ending, you can have a good time with this one.



Minimum System Requirements: 486/33 or faster processor, 8MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM, MS-DOS 5.0 or higher, 60MB free hard drive space, mouse, sound card, 256-color VESA or PCI local bus video.
Multiplayer Support: None.
Developer/Publisher: Sirtech
Ogdensburg, NY
(315) 393-6451
www.sir-tech.com
Reader Service #: 337

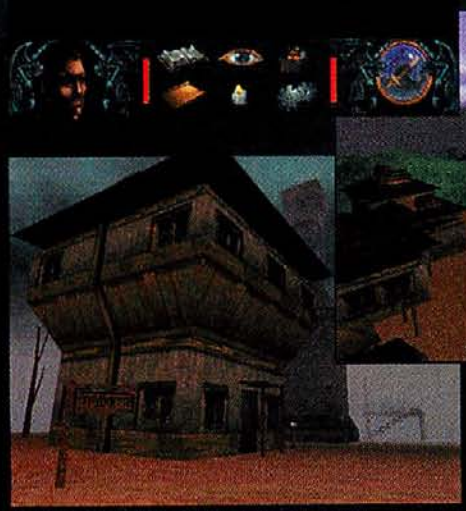
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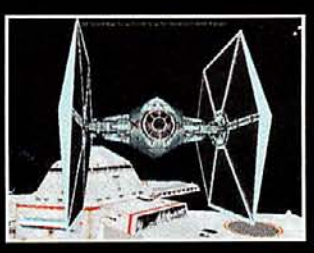



(Floyd from Accounting.)

engine is phenomenal. The new missions are masterstrokes of space mayhem. There's even single player campaigns for an all-new explosive experience. No wonder *Computer Gaming World* proclaims **X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter** "number one on every space sim-er's wish list." And if you don't believe them, just ask Floyd. http://www.lucasarts.com









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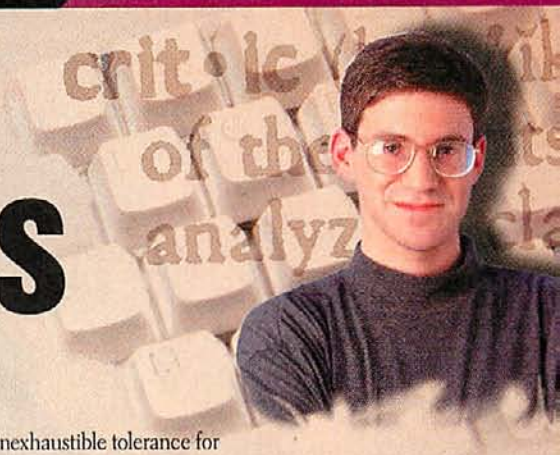
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #174

Toys for Boys

When Will Computer Games Grow Up?



People are always surprised when I tell them that the average reader of this magazine is a man in his thirties. They shouldn't be: One tends to have more disposable income, both for purchasing magazines and for purchasing computer games (not to mention purchasing computers), as an adult than as a youth. But surprised they are, and I can't pretend that their surprise surprises me.

Why? Because to a casual observer, computer games seem mostly to be pitched at an audience of young boys: what with their never-ending litany of baseball games, car races, swooping spaceships, broadsword-wielding barbarians, and giant clanking robots. These are the metaphors of preadolescence, a phase boys go through when they haven't yet discovered girls and still think "gross" and "cool" are synonyms. It's a phase during which adrenaline is still the bodily fluid they prize most, and the most fun they can have involves blowing something up.

It's also a phase most of them leave behind. Though an *Indiana Jones* flick can still stir the old yearnings, as can a ball game or a car race, a thirty-year-old's fantasies and tastes tend to differ from those of a preteen. Why, then, do so many computer games display the sensibility not only of a preteen, but of a particularly creepy one?

A BLOODY BUSINESS

It's not the baseball, or even the explosions, but the blood that so aptly illustrates my point. Lately, an awful lot of the stuff has been seeping into computer games, and even more into the marketing campaigns that sell the games. I suppose this is thanks to MORTAL KOMBAT and DOOM, those hallmarks of bloodletting by the bucket. But recently, the emphasis has shifted—the focus is not merely on the violent, but on the repulsively so.

Look at the gatefold ad (in *CGW* and other magazines) for SHADOW WARRIOR, featuring a skull with a shuriken embedded between its eyes, another character with his brains splattered against a wall, and an exhortation to the player to "annihilate" and "mutilate." Later in the same issue you see a bloody skull impaled on stakes (SECRETS OF THE LUXOR), a fanged monster in a sort of SS uniform stepping on the throat of a bloody corpse (CAVEWARS), an IV drip bag filled with blood (PROFESSIONAL UNDERGROUND LEAGUE OF PAIN), and a man soaking in a bathtub full of blood (BLOOD).

While it's easy to pick on the ads, the real problem is that this repulsive attitude pervades the games as well: BIOFORGE, for instance, opens with a mutilation (yours); DREAMWEB contains several bloody homicides (performed by you); HELL features all sorts of writhing torture victims; and this doesn't even count Sierra's PHANTASMAGORIA games, or any of the DOOM clones.

Some people say that this material is inappropriate for kids. I would argue that it's inappropriate for anyone. Kids have an inexhaustible tolerance for blood, never having spilled any of their own; they enjoy these games at an abstract level and forget about them before reaching adulthood. Adults, on the other hand, should know better, and those who are attracted to this sort of gore worry me.

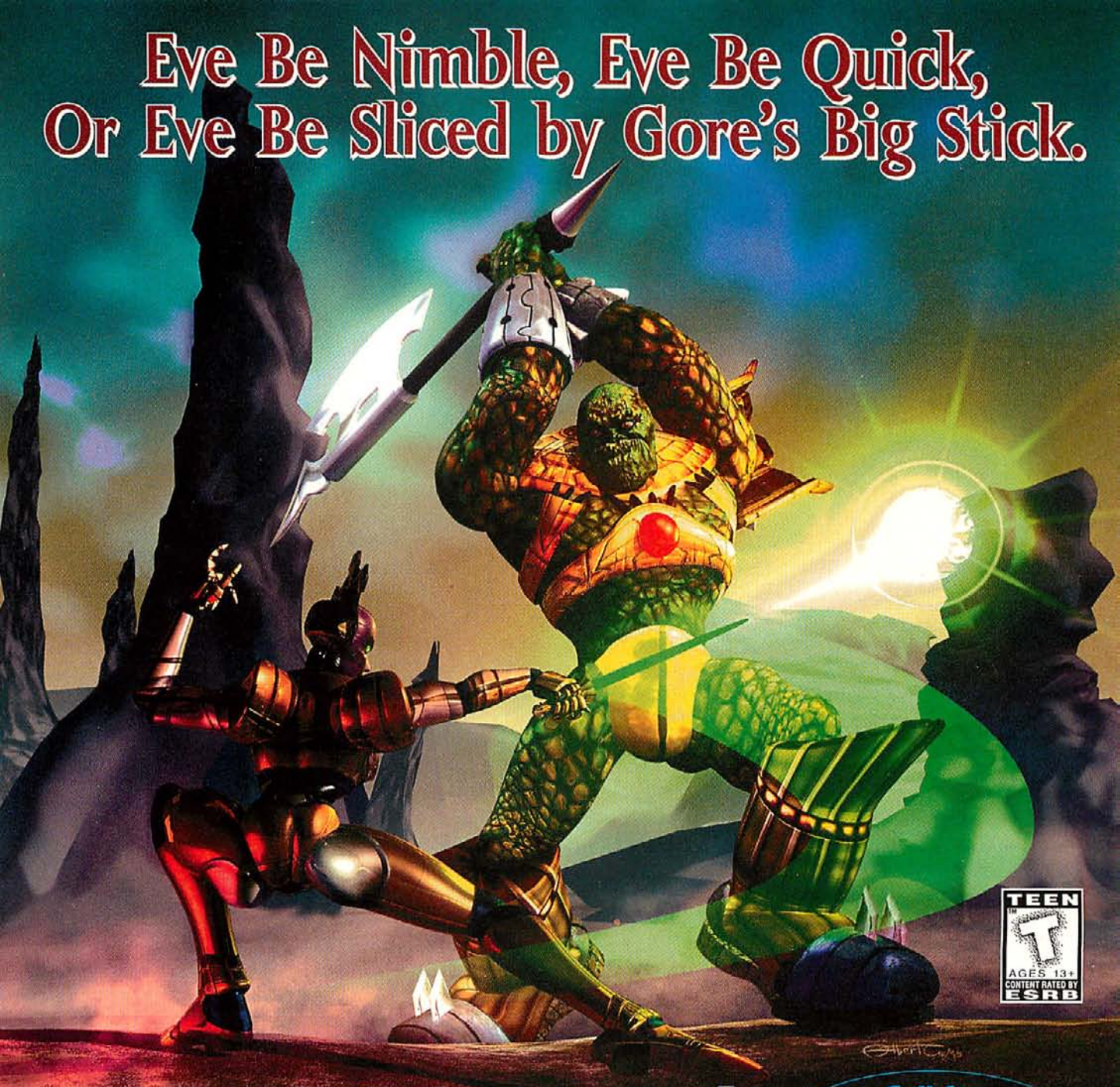
We expect different levels of discrimination from children than from adults. The nine-year-old who giggles when confronted with extreme screen violence does so in innocence; the twenty-nine-year-old who does so is, at best, immature and, at worst, sociopathic.

I prefer to assume that game publishers and their ad agencies think they are reaching nine-year-olds. This is better than assuming that they think they are reaching sociopaths. But either way, they are wrong—just as the people who do a doubletake when I tell them our average reader's age are wrong. Unfortunately, one reinforces the other in a nasty feedback loop.

There is nothing wrong with making games that will appeal to kids (though it would also be nice to see more titles that target adult tastes). There *is* something wrong with making games that appeal to the worst in our kids and in ourselves, and something more subtly wrong with perpetuating the public misconception of computer gaming as a hobby for the *Faces of Death* wing of the *Dungeons and Dragons* set. We owe it to ourselves not to give people an excuse to sneer at us. I urge computer game publishers to use better judgment the next time their ad men say, "Let's show some gouged-out eyes—gamers eat that stuff up."

"Why do so many computer games display the sensibility not only of a preteen, but of a particularly creepy one?"

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Battling Over the Net

The First Newcomer Takes On the Online Sim World



One of the things that has held back online sims for so long has been their inaccessibility to the less hard-core computer gamer. The software itself has had a fairly tough learning curve, and the regular players are borderline fanatical in both enthusiasm and ability. Now, two new entries in the market, Microsoft's FIGHTER ACE and CONFIRMED KILL from Eidos, are aiming across the spectrum of users, working to be accessible to beginners while providing a feature set that will appeal to established online-sim fans.

The established sims aren't content to sit and be passed by the new guys, however. The Kesmai AIR WARRIOR development team is working to add Direct 3D graphics support, as well as a new online scenario setup that will allow players to fly more historical missions profiles. I-Magic Online's WARBIRDS is also soon to undergo the 3D treatment, and it's getting an interface-lift that should make the game less intimidating to newbie pilots.



BATTLE OF BRITAIN WARBIRDS 2.0 includes the Bf-110, as well as early Spitfires, Hurricanes, and Bf-109s.

> "WARBIRDS is no longer the new kid on the block, but it's steeled to handle the competition."

RESTORING WARBIRDS

WARBIRDS 2.0, due out by the time you read this, will feature a revamped interface that aims to end the days of having to learn commands like ".ord 3" just to load your plane with bombs and rockets. (The dot commands will still be there for old-timers.) You'll now be able to select a plane from a pull-down list. If you're familiar with all the craft in the game, you'll see a list of specifications as well as an external view of the plane. You'll also be one click away from detailed historical information on each plane. From the portions in place in my preview copy, it seems I-Magic Online has made the interface both attractive and accessible, without making it unwieldy.

One of the biggest improvements to the game isn't exactly new. Early beta versions of the game featured rolling terrain, which not only allowed for interesting low-level dogfights, but also made low-altitude sneak attacks a possibility. Alas, this was lost when

ON THE RADAR



Flight Simulator '98

Even the oldest flight sim around is jumping on the multiplayer bandwagon. Set for release in November, Microsoft's FLIGHT SIMULATOR '98 will support free play via the Internet Gaming Zone. There's still no combat, but Microsoft hopes players will want to organize events such as virtual air shows and fly-ins.

Other new features will include a Bell 206 helicopter, improved flight modeling, force-feedback joystick support, better instrument panels, more cities, and 3,000 airports. Best of all, the creaky graphics engine is getting a Direct3D update, which promises better scenery and faster frame rates for owners of 3D cards.



ROLLIN', ROLLIN', ROLLIN'

Rolling terrain makes sneak attacks possible in WARBIRDS 2.0. Graphics are kept simple to ensure high frame rate; the upcoming 3Dfx version should be more visually exciting.



FACELIFT

WARBIRDS 2.0 features a new point-and-click interface that eliminates the need to memorize obscure dot commands.



VIRTUALLY DEAD

FIGHTER ACE includes a superb padlock and virtual cockpit feature that makes it easy to track targets.

the developers switched to a new graphics engine. Well, say goodbye to tabletop terrain, because in WARBIRDS 2.0 rolling terrain is back, and the hills are alive with the sound of 20mm gunfire.

You'll find the some real improvements in ground armament as well. Instead of the overly deadly, too-accurate AA guns found in earlier versions, WARBIRDS 2.0 will feature a variety of ground-based defenders, including individual soldiers brandishing machine guns, as well as fixed 20mm and 40mm guns. In addition, flak bursts now appear at high altitude, giving Buff (bomber) drivers something else to worry about besides patrolling fighters.

You'll find more structures on the ground now, along with improvements to existing structures and vehicles. Torpedo a ship in WARBIRDS 2.0 and it does more than just catch fire: It lists, begins to sink, and eventually goes down with its screw being the last thing you see. The scenery has likely been made more populous in preparation for adding a strategic war in the near future. Other recent improvements include voice support and free head-to-head play.

While the interface graphics have seen dramatic improvements, the flight engine is still based on detailed, non-texture-mapped polygons to ensure the best frame rate. Still, there are some nice improvements evident, such as hazing in the distance. Look for WARBIRDS to get a dramatic supercharging in the graphics department soon after version 2.0 is released, when the company releases a special version designed to run on 3Dfx Voodoo-based graphics cards.

Check **www.icigames.com** for the latest update. Even if you have no desire to spend the hourly fee for online play, you can take advantage of head-to-head modem or Internet play at no charge.

ACES OVER REDMOND

Microsoft's entry into the online sim fray advances the genre in a number of respects, in both technical and financial models. The preview version of FIGHTER ACE that members of the press could compete on just prior to the E3 still needed quite a bit of fine-tuning, however.

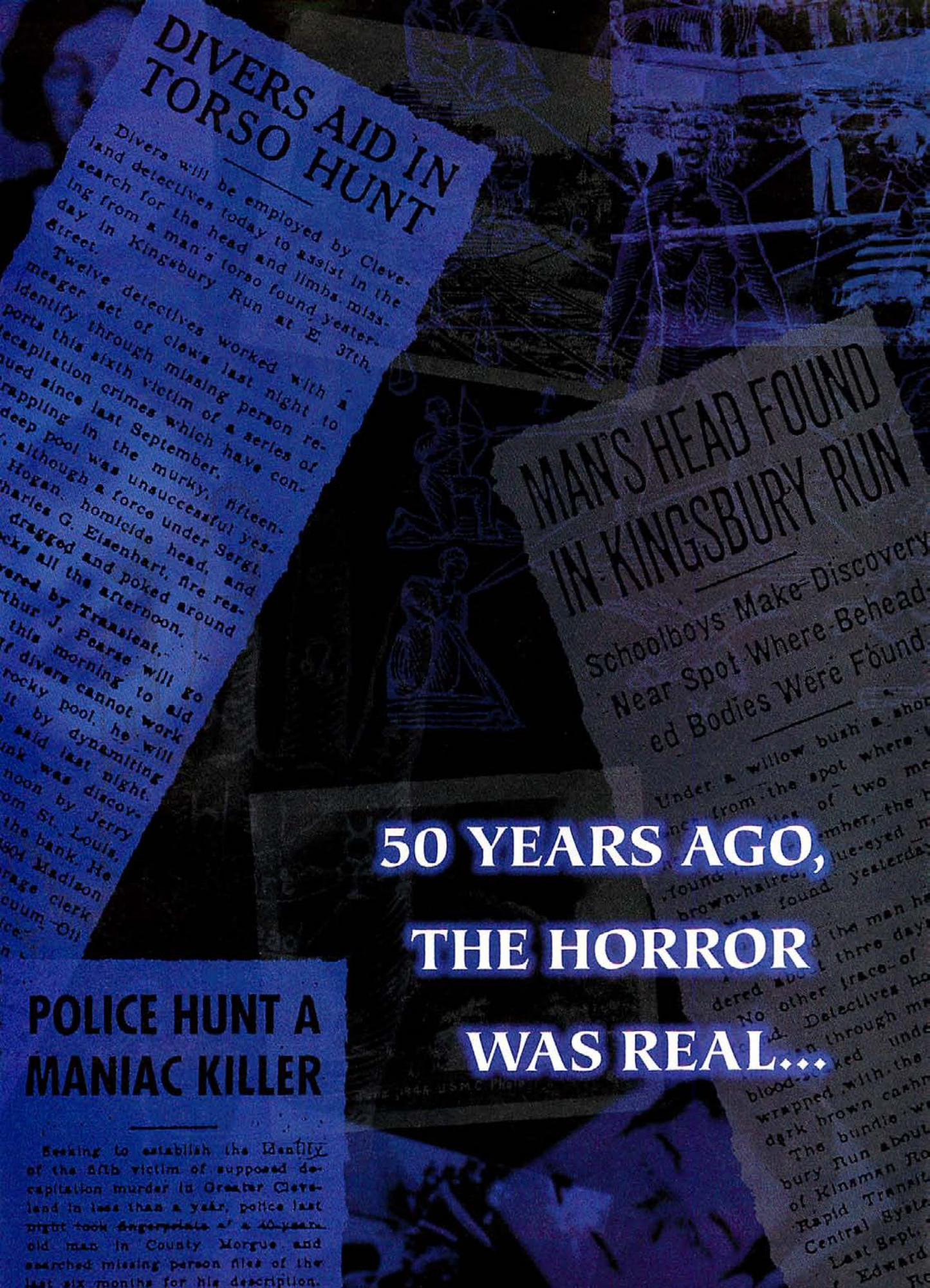
Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of FIGHTER ACE is its pricing model. Instead of the hourly rates charged by AIR WARRIOR II and WARBIRDS, FIGHTER ACE will allow players to pay by the day or month on the Internet Gaming Zone. Removing the pressure of the clock ticking away at your credit card is a superb feature, and I'd imagine that Kesmai and I-Magic Online will have to reevaluate their pricing models.

FIGHTER ACE is the first online flight sim to feature a modern graphics engine. But this turns out to be a mixed blessing. On the plus side, battling detailed aircraft over realistic terrain does immerse you in the game. However, the detail of the terrain makes it very difficult to pick out aircraft at a distance. Thus, you end up turning on player name and range displays, which are easy to pick out, but you spend more time chasing flying words than aircraft.

Because the version we played was preliminary, without all its features implemented, it was too early to judge the flight models. If things remain as when we competed, though, you'll find the planes a bit easier to fly than the current crop of online sims.

The combat was amusingly one-sided, with a flying mix of both dedicated sim journalists and less-specialized game writers. Hard-core sim pilots like Robin "Sandman" Kim and Tom "Thunk" Basham racked up kills right and left against hapless beginners. When the game goes live, it will feature a variety of arenas, so expert players will quickly progress to the more advanced arenas. This should keep the hotshots from preying on newbies.

This preliminary version wasn't fully play-balanced yet (if you were damaged, it was way too easy to just exit the game to avoid being killed, for instance), so a full evaluation will have to wait for the game to go live. You should be able to check it out for yourself now at **www.zone.com**


DIVERS AID IN TORSO HUNT
Divers will be employed by Cleveland detectives today to assist in the search for the head and limbs missing from a man's torso found yesterday in Kingsbury Run at E. 37th street.
Twelve detectives worked with a meager set of clews last night to identify through missing person reports this sixth victim of a series of decapitation crimes which have continued since last September.
MAN'S HEAD FOUND IN KINGSBURY RUN
Schoolboys Make Discovery Near Spot Where Beheaded Bodies Were Found
50 YEARS AGO, THE HORROR WAS REAL...
POLICE HUNT A MANIAC KILLER
Seeking to establish the identity of the fifth victim of supposed decapitation murder in Greater Cleveland in less than a year, police last night took fingerprints of a 40-year-old man in County Morgue and searched missing person files of the last six months for his description.


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"CONFLICT" MY ASS

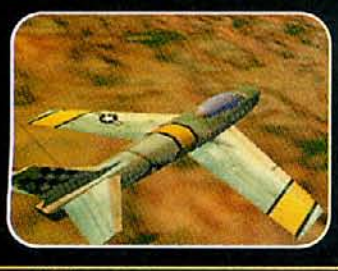
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CONFLICT OVER KOREA









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Alien in Sheep's Clothing



Where Are All the X-COM Clones?

For strategy gamers, the most beloved sci-fi hit of the past decade was X-COM, which dominated the *CGW* readers' poll for more than two years. This sleeper won *CGW*'s overall game of the year by blending CIVILIZATION-style research and a real-time strategy game with the best tactical combat squad-level system to date—somehow managing to perfectly capture the bizarre mix of fact, myth, and wonder that makes up UFO mania. However, what X-COM *didn't* do, despite its success, was spawn a host of imitators.

SECRET ALIEN PACTS?

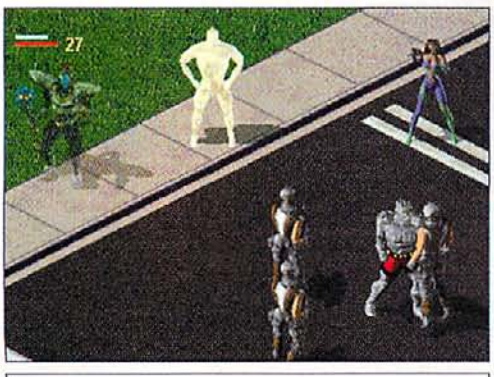
The most recent cloning attempts, such as FALLEN HAVEN and WAGES OF WAR, failed to understand why the original X-COM was so much fun. Their lack of personality and focus mired them in their own mediocrity. Even the X-COM designers themselves seem to have fallen prey to this insidious alien plot. Months ago, when I tried to divine where they were going with APOCALYPSE, they answered, "This virtual city is really where we've wanted to take the design all along. It's the only real direction for the universe to grow." When I asked why they wouldn't let gamers play the aliens this time around, they replied, "Why would anyone want to do that?"

The designers further hedged their bets by giving X-COM: APOCALYPSE both real-time and turn-based play (see Martin Cirulis' sneak preview in the July, 1997, *CGW*). One has to wonder why this is so: Either the market is there for a true X-COM sequel or it isn't. Personally, I look forward to a real-time X-COM about as much as a turn-based WARCRAFT II, or a roasted tofu burger.

Clearly, if the originators of X-COM aren't too enthused about their original game system, the rest of the industry is less likely to take up the turn-based torch. Could it be that the advent of real-time strategy games has passed the X-COM system by? The evidence doesn't really support such a contention. X-COM: UFO DEFENSE and X-COM: TERROR OF THE DEEP together sold over a million units worldwide in a competitive strategy-gaming market. And since this was achieved with budgets that comprised mere fractions of say, RED ALERT or WING COMMANDERS III–IV, it's fair to assume that the return on investment for the X-COM duo was more than satisfactory. For whatever it's worth, MicroProse seems to still enjoy publishing turn-based games, especially since CIV II has evidently sold more than three-quarters of a million units.

So, given that the jury is still out on X-COM: APOCALYPSE (although rumors

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MEN IN TIGHTS AGENTS OF JUSTICE has such an authentic comics flavor that you can almost feel your superhero musculature beneath the spandex.



STREETS OF SAARBRUCKEN The view in SOLDIERS AT WAR may be typical of X-COM clones, but the WWII European streets are gritty and realistic.

If you want to fly like an ace, you'll have to know what buttons to push.

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abound that a deal for X-COM 4 is very close), where do fans of the system go from here? Ironically, the best X-COM clone isn't science fiction, but a contemporary-era game that focuses on mercenary actions. Sir-Tech's JAGGED ALLIANCE: DEADLY GAMES captures more than just the mechanics of X-COM. The psychological profiles of the various meres range from loyal and intelligent to bloodthirsty and paranoid, but they all manage to be interesting. And while the missions in JAGGED ALLIANCE: DEADLY GAMES aren't quite up to the night terror excursions of X-COM, they're still plenty tense and enjoyable. Best of all, it's multiplayer, something the X-COM folks haven't yet managed.

On the other hand, if you've already played JAGGED ALLIANCE to death, or simply can't go back to the dated graphic look, what can you do? The bad news is that there just aren't many X-COM clones in the works. The good news is that those just over the horizon are looking very nice indeed.



VE ARE READY TO LAUNCH One of the best missions in SOLDIERS AT WAR requires that you take out an enemy V-2 site.

AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

Those who believe that comics are just for kids probably think HARPOON is primarily played by adolescents. Well, it's their loss if they pass up AGENTS OF JUSTICE, one of the freshest-looking titles of the year. Nearly two years of development have streamlined the design in some areas for accessibility, while simultaneously enriching the gaming environment.

AGENTS OF JUSTICE creates a futuristic world where mutant beings of

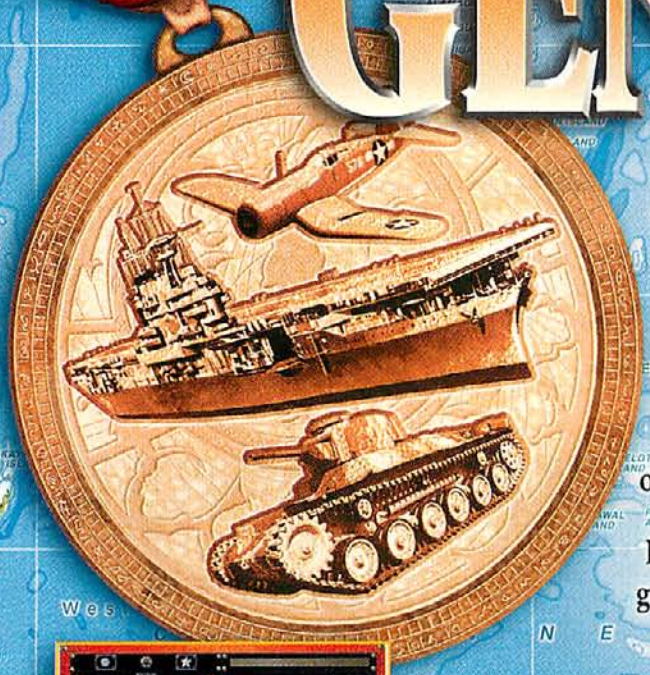


CON GAME

By the time you read this, most of the summer gaming conventions, including Origins and AvalonCon, will be history, but you might possibly squeeze into GenCon. Taking place this year from August 7–10, the oldest role-playing convention celebrates its 30th year with an increased emphasis on board- and computer gaming. SSI has confirmed that they will be making the trip, and also will debut new products at the show. If you can't attend the convention in person this year, check out reports from yours truly and other *CGW* editors on **www.computergaming.com** and **www.gamespot.com.**



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BRIEFINGS

FEEDING FRENZY

Quick: How many MYST-clones can you remember that you liked at all, much less recommended to your friends? Well, the same thing is happening in strategy/wargames, except it's worse. The conservative estimate at *CGW* has more than *three dozen* real-time strategy games shipping this year, with three to four times that number slated for 1998. If the majority of them were anywhere near as good as WARCRAFT II or C&C: RED ALERT, you'd get no complaints from me. But most of these designs are simply poor derivatives trying to cash in on the recent real-time craze.

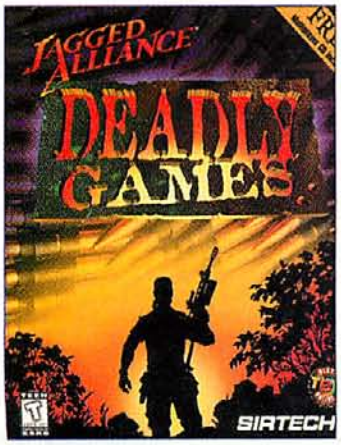
Here's an example of how out of control industry marketers are: In a product demo for a racing game I recently attended, every few seconds, the words "real-time racing" would flash on the screen in 34-point type. I was so irritated that I finally raised my hand and asked, "I'm confused. Was this originally a turn-based racing design?" The worst part was that the marketing people didn't get the joke. The next thing you know, we'll be getting demos of "real-time" flight sims.

The worst thing about the glut of real-time strategy product is that some good games are going to get lost, simply because the market can't support them all. I saw two really good turn-based games at the recent Computer Game Developer's Conference and asked the designers why they were still doing "dinosaur games." Their reply was that there were, at most, 12 good turn-based games a year: "We can compete against a dozen games in our category. If you're doing real-time strategy games, you compete against 112." Six months ago I would have considered that comment an exaggeration; I don't anymore.

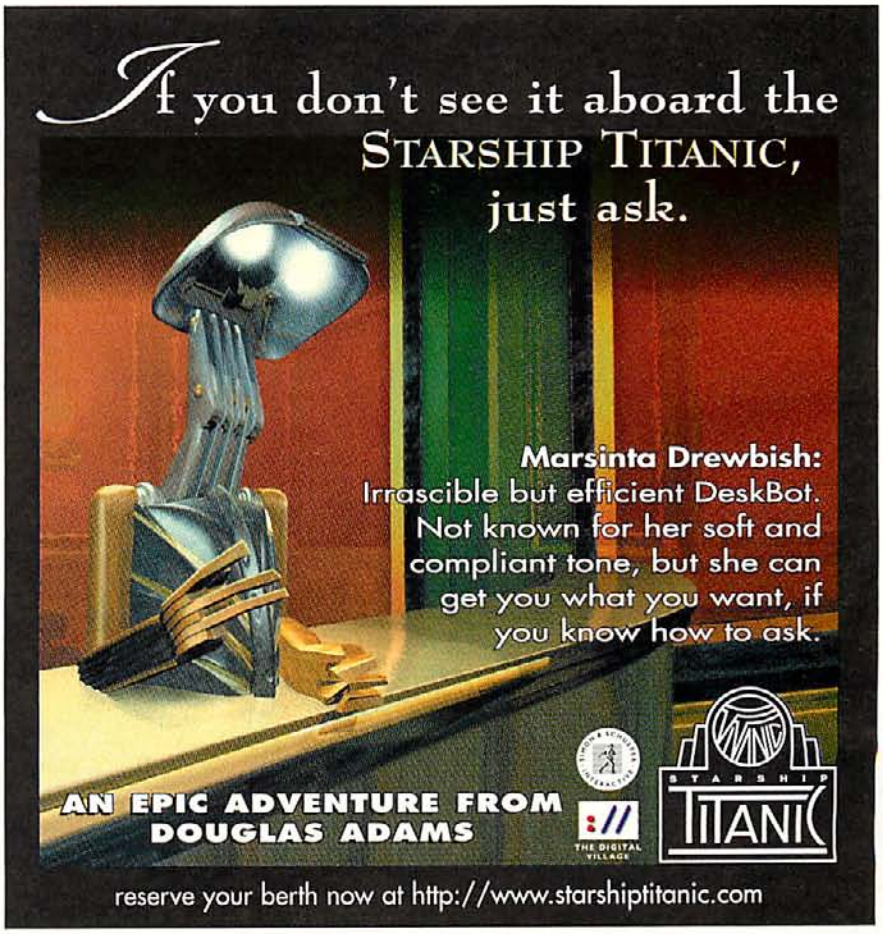
▸▸▸Continued on pg 269

fantastic powers vie for world dominance. The Tech Lords sport fabulous gadgets that could make Iron Man jealous, while the Shadowyn use their ninja powers in more subtly evil fashions, and the Claw seem to be the 21st century's version of egomaniacal super-thugs. You lead the Star Council, fighting for truth, justice, and...you get the picture.

The X-COM similarity comes from the tactical isometric turn-based combat, but AGENTS features heroes and villains whose graphic splendor strikes a nice balance between the classic style of Stan Lee and the dark knights of recent graphic novels. Fans of the original *X-Men* will thrill to the mental attack possibilities, some of which put the Ethereals of X-COM to shame. Modifying your own superhero is a mini-game in itself, reminiscent of the joy derived from designing your own ships in MASTER OF ORION. With hundreds of nefarious plots that are randomized with each new game, AGENTS



JAGGED ALLIANCE: DEADLY GAMES is currently the best X-COM clone, but contenders are actively seeking its crown.



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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #125

Continued from pg 267

In any case, having watched a scintillating Kentucky Derby mere weeks before press time, I couldn't resist doing my own handicapping of upcoming real-time strategy games. Keep in mind that *CGW* accepts no responsibility for late injuries to mounts or for programming jockeys jumping to rival stables:

Against All Odds: The Real-time Wars

Game	Company	Racing Notes	Odds
StarCraft	Blizzard	A thoroughbred trained by the best	1:2
Command & Conquer II	Westwood/Virgin	Going for the real-time Triple Crown	2:5
Sid Meier's Gettysburg	Firaxis/EA	Master jockey still has great hands	Even
Dark Reign	Activision	Best-looking relative of C&C/WarCraft, and it's hungry	3:2
Rebellion	LucasArts	Delays are worrisome, but it's still a prime stable	2:1
SimCity 3000	Maxis	The original real-time stud is still tough down the stretch	5:2
Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain	Heliotrope/THQ	Trimmed down filly could set early pace	3:1
Close Combat II	Atomic/Microsoft	A much improved breed	4:1
Age of Empires	Microsoft	Bruce Shelley-trained mount looks fresh	5:1
Tone Rebellion	Logic Factory	Beautiful steed, can it go the distance?	10:1
WarBreeds	Broderbund	Sci-fi stallion has spirit, may not be enough vs. comp	15:1
WarWind II	SSI	It is a sequel driven business...	25:1
Warhammer II: Dark Omen	Will	Will 3D support be enough?	50:1
Outpost II	Sierra	Never underestimate Sierra's retail muscle, or Pat Cook	75:1
Field	anyone & everyone	Don't bet the farm	1000:1

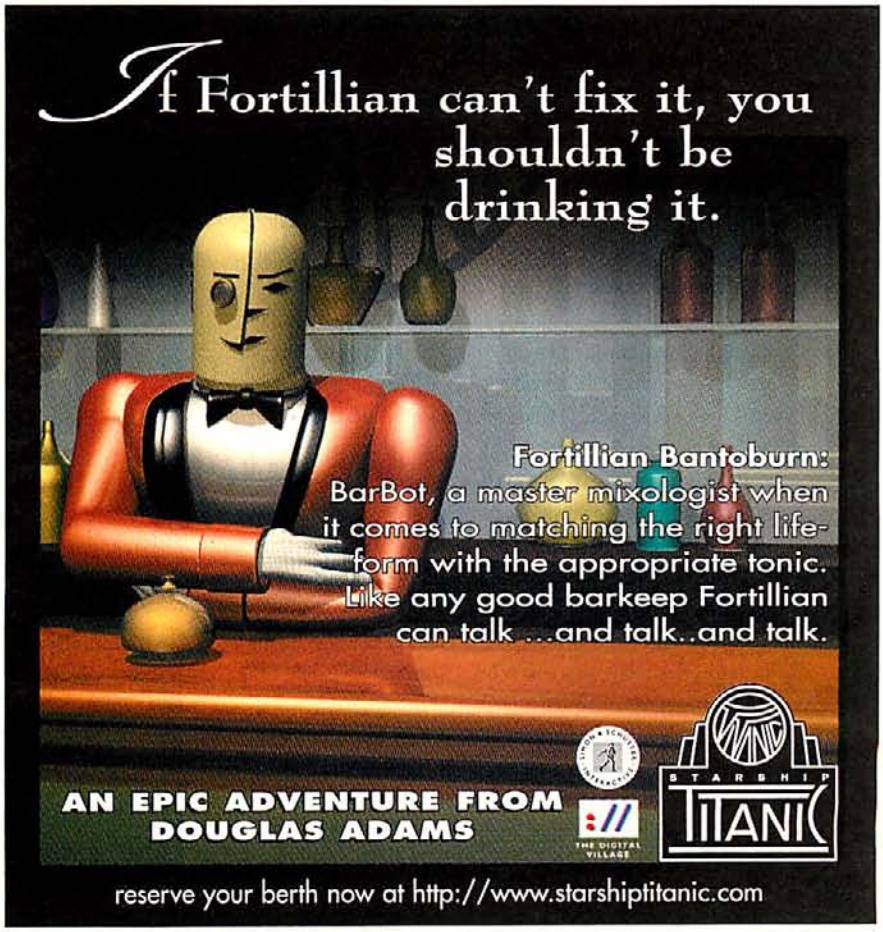
OF JUSTICE will keep you bashing bad guys until the Comics Code comes home to roost.

So, even if you have to shoot Germans and slug it out with supervillains rather than green-skinned aliens, these games promise a refreshing changer. By this time next year, we may even get some sci-fi X-COM clones, who knows?

NO SARGE REQUIRED

If you've ever watched old episodes of *Combat!* on late-night TV, you already know the plotline of SSI's upcoming SOLDIERS AT WAR. The streets are dusty, the buildings are often cracked and reduced to rubble, and the whole effect of this X-COM clone is gritty, and it gets down to business in WWII Europe in a way that'd make Sgt. Rock proud.

The three-quarter SVGA-graphics view works very well with the fog of war to keep you wondering whether there really is a German sniper in the church tower over yonder. The game is intended to be about as realistic as PANZER GENERAL on a small-unit scale, but the morale system has a lot of the correct feel. Plus, the scenarios are a riot; everything from night infiltration missions to blowing up V-2 rocket sites is included. If the AI turns out as nicely as we expect—and if the likely modem play works, too—this should be a very big hit for SSI.



STRATEGY & TIPS

Theme Hospital

Get Your Virtual Hospital Running Smoothly, Stat!

by Dawn Jepsen

The last shreds of your already pathetic life are slipping away. Your diet of late has consisted of whatever nonperishables can be kept within arm's length. Your lower back is throbbing. Your mouse hand is cramped and clawlike from overuse. Your eyes, glazed and scratchy, look like a "before" picture for Visine. If all of this sounds a bit too familiar, stay calm. The bloody Brits from Bullfrog have made a THEME HOSPITAL addict of you. And just when you thought there was a light at the end of the tunnel, along comes a patch that adds new features. The only possible cure is to win. Our prescription? Take two of these tips every four hours and you'll be up and walking away a victor in no time.

Admissions

When you start any new level, especially Level 6 and higher, it's important to scan the layout of the hospital and the town map. On higher levels, additional buildings you purchase might be connected to the main hospital, so it's important not to block off future halls with treatment rooms.

At more difficult levels, you should alter the game speed to Slow during the initial building phase, so that you can set up the basics of your hospital without the distractions of emergencies or impending epidemics. While you're building, your less-talented doctors can acquire new and better skills under the advisement of a consultant.

Because doctors are on the job market for only a limited amount of time, you'll want to hire all available physicians at the beginning of the game—especially surgeons, researchers, and psychiatrists—and place the ones with minimal skills in the training room. Always be on the lookout for good employees, especially those described as "careful and dependable in an emergency." Don't worry about having too many doctors at first; they'll be needed when you have eight different treatment clinics up and running.

Hospital layout is important. On every level, it's a good idea to begin with at least two general practitioner's offices, since all patients must be seen there first. You'll also want to put at least one pharmacy as near as possible to the main entrance of the hospital. Many emergencies require immediate treatment from either the pharmacy or



MORALE BOOSTERS In diagnostic rooms, wards, and facilities you can add plants, fire extinguishers, and extra furniture to increase the morale of the staff and the overall value of the hospital. Don't bother making treatment clinics too elaborate—little time is spent there.

When All Else Fails

If you're suffering from an epidemic of losses, you can always cheat. To enable the cheat mode, you must enter a code on the fax machine screen. (Build a receptionist and a general practitioner's office, and the machine will appear when the first patient comes in.) When the machine appears, enter the number 24328 on the fax machine keypad and click on the green Send button. The following cheats will now work:

Shift-C	Get $10,000
Ctrl-C	All research completed
Ctrl-M	Go to the end of the month
Ctrl-Y	Go to the end of the year

You'll then need to respond to the fax normally. Also, if you enter 7287 on the keypad, you will go to a rat-shooting level after you win the current level.

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #072

Printed in U.S.A

psychiatry, so make these rooms easily accessible, with plenty of nearby seating.

Arrange your rooms so they can be handled by the fewest possible staff members. For example, one nurse can effectively manage the ward, the pharmacy, and the fracture clinic (if these areas are grouped together). During an emergency, drop a doctor or nurse into the proper treatment room to save time. If they have a poor "attention to detail" rating, they will often ignore pages asking their assistance.



BLOWUPS HAPPEN In later levels, equipment explosions can destroy machinery and render rooms useless for the rest of the level. Be sure to have plenty of handymen with machinery repair as their priority.

Also, watch for occasional bugs such as people getting stuck in a doorway. If you suddenly don't see any of your handymen, check the various doorways for a pile of them, then use your pinchers to pull them out.

Treatment

Once the hospital is laid out according to your liking, increase the game speed to its fastest setting. This will speed up the training of the junior doctors and bring more patients in the door. Also, go to the research screen and increase the priority of diagnostic machinery and medications, all the while decreasing specialization until later in the game.

During emergencies, slow the game down until you see where the emergency patients need to go and ensure that the appropriate doctors or nurses are in place. When an epidemic breaks out, vaccinate all infected patients before sending them home. Not doing so will result in a very large fine. Speaking of cash flow, be sure to click on the various awards and statuettes that appear at times on each level—you'll see nice bonus rewards for good performance.

Group Therapy

Grab the THEME HOSPITAL patch from **www.bullfrog.co.uk/themedownload**. This not only treats some of the game's minor bugs, but also adds three difficulty levels and a multiplayer mode that supports serial, modem, and IPX network connections. Multiplayer pits you against up to three human hospital managers in a battle for patients, reputation, and dollars. Gameplay is essentially the same, with the added elements of bidding for expansion buildings, recruiting other gamers' staff, and planting nasty litter bombs in your opponents' hospitals.

Here are some tips for getting ahead of your opponents in multiplayer mode.

Before doing anything else, view the doctors available for hire. Your opponents will be hiring from the same pool, so you should ideally hire all of the good ones for yourself and leave them the dregs. If they get the good staffers, wait until the game gets rolling, then liberally poach your opponents' staff. If you click on a doctor who's unhappy, he'll make an outrageous pay demand of his current employer. If it's not met, he'll come work for you. Either you end up with a new staff member or your opponent ends up with higher costs. A win-win situation. But pay close attention to your own staff's satisfaction level or you may find this tactic being used against you.

When placing litter bombs, look for a narrow, horizontal hallway. Bombs are hardest to see here and are more likely to go off before your opponent can find them, because there's no option to peek through obstructing walls. Hold bombs in your hospital for as long as possible, then drop them off, giving your opponent less time to discover them and drop them back into your hospital.

On the Level

If there's a level you just can't get past, you can use a command-line switch to force THEME HOSPITAL to go directly to a certain level. If you're running the MS-DOS version, simply start the program using the command HOSPITAL -Lx, where x is the number of the level in which you want to start.

This procedure also works in the Windows 95 version, but it's a bit more complicated, as you have to modify the command contained in the program's icon. First, click with the right mouse button on Windows 95's Start button, then choose Explore. Work your way down the directory until you find the THEME HOSPITAL icon (by default it will be under Programs/Bullfrog). Now right-click on the icon and choose Copy. Right-click again and choose Paste.

Right-click on the new copy of the icon and choose Properties, then click the Shortcut tab. At the end of the Target line (which should read something along the lines of "C:\Program Files\Bullfrog\Hospital\Hospital.EXE"), add a space and then -Lx, where x is the level number you want to play. (Note that the portion you add should be outside the quotation marks.)

Now you can just double-click that icon to go directly to the chosen level. To alter the level, simply repeat the procedure above, changing the level number after the L. Or, make multiple copies of the icon and set a different level for each one.

Dragon Lore II

The Heart of the Dragon Man

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STRATEGY & TIPS

Scorpia's Mail

Scorpia Reaches Into the Mailbag Once More to Help Puzzled Adventurers

Well, as I suspected last time, there aren't many new adventure or role-playing games to be found on the racks right now. Of course, as I write this, SHADOWS OVER RIVA has just come out, and there are mysterious murmurings about BETRAYAL AT ANTARA, which may be released by the time you read this...or maybe not, what with the way games get pushed back these days. Aside from that, the prospect for anything good coming out before autumn is rather bleak. So, whatever you're playing, try to make it last a while, because we're probably in for another long, dry summer. In the meantime, let's get to the mailbag.

Daggerfall

If you haven't been keeping up with the patches, you should be. As you likely know from hard experience (heh!), the side-quest dungeons are large, and finding the necessary items can be a pain. Bethesda has changed that now. The most recent patch re-enabled some of the playtester cheat keys. One of them allows you to breeze through the dungeon to the room that has the item you're looking for. Something like that is, of course, a great temptation, but it can certainly help when you're really frustrated. The patch is available from many online services, as well as from Bethesda's Web site, **www.bethsoft.com**.



Discworld II

Here, mousie mousie. Actually, getting the mouse isn't a problem. Getting his blood, well, that's something else again. You really need to sink your teeth (or someone's teeth) into the matter. A little help from a fly-by-night is certainly necessary. A pity that dawn is so far off; it's nothing to crow about. Or is it?

Fable

Getting started in the Land of Mists may be a bit difficult for some gamers. There doesn't seem to be a lot to work with, and there seems to be no way past the tower guard or the woman in the swamp. However, don't be in a hurry to burn your bridges; sometimes, it's better to look under them instead.

Crusaders of the Dark Savant

One of the more roundabout tasks here is finding out the names of the four witches. First, you'll need to pay a visit to the Giants (no relation to any football team, heh!); they have something of great importance. Then it's off to the vicinity of Ukpyr. I've heard the woods around there can be very informative at night, especially for the properly dressed character.

Wizardry Nemesis

The fire on the second floor in Nithera is an obstacle you have to overcome. Unfortunately, no hoses are available, so you'll have to find a more indirect way of putting it out. Y'know, there might even be a control somewhere for this, if only you could find it. You might want to look somewhere lower down, and try not to butt your head against any walls.

The Pandora Directive

Gamers in Expert mode may find themselves having a frustrating time in the Mayan pyramid's fireball corridor. That's no surprise, because the answer is rather inane. You simply have to make your way across and try all four doors. It doesn't matter which one you start with, or in what order you do it; whichever door is the fourth one you try is the one that will open. This is not one of the better puzzles in the game, alas.

Dark Sun II

After a long hiatus, this one is showing up again (love them shovelware CDs! By the way, just as an aside, if you're suffering from CRPG withdrawal, you may want to check out some of the collections on the racks these days). Anyway, down in those mines, you have to find the killers before you can proceed to the main event. I suggest a quick trip to Luckout Tunnels, and then a quick tour of the other mine levels (but not as far up as the entry level). Move fast, because the killers won't be waiting around for you. Once they're dead, a secret door opens elsewhere, and you'll soon be on your way to a romp in Mind Flayer country (just what you've always wanted!).

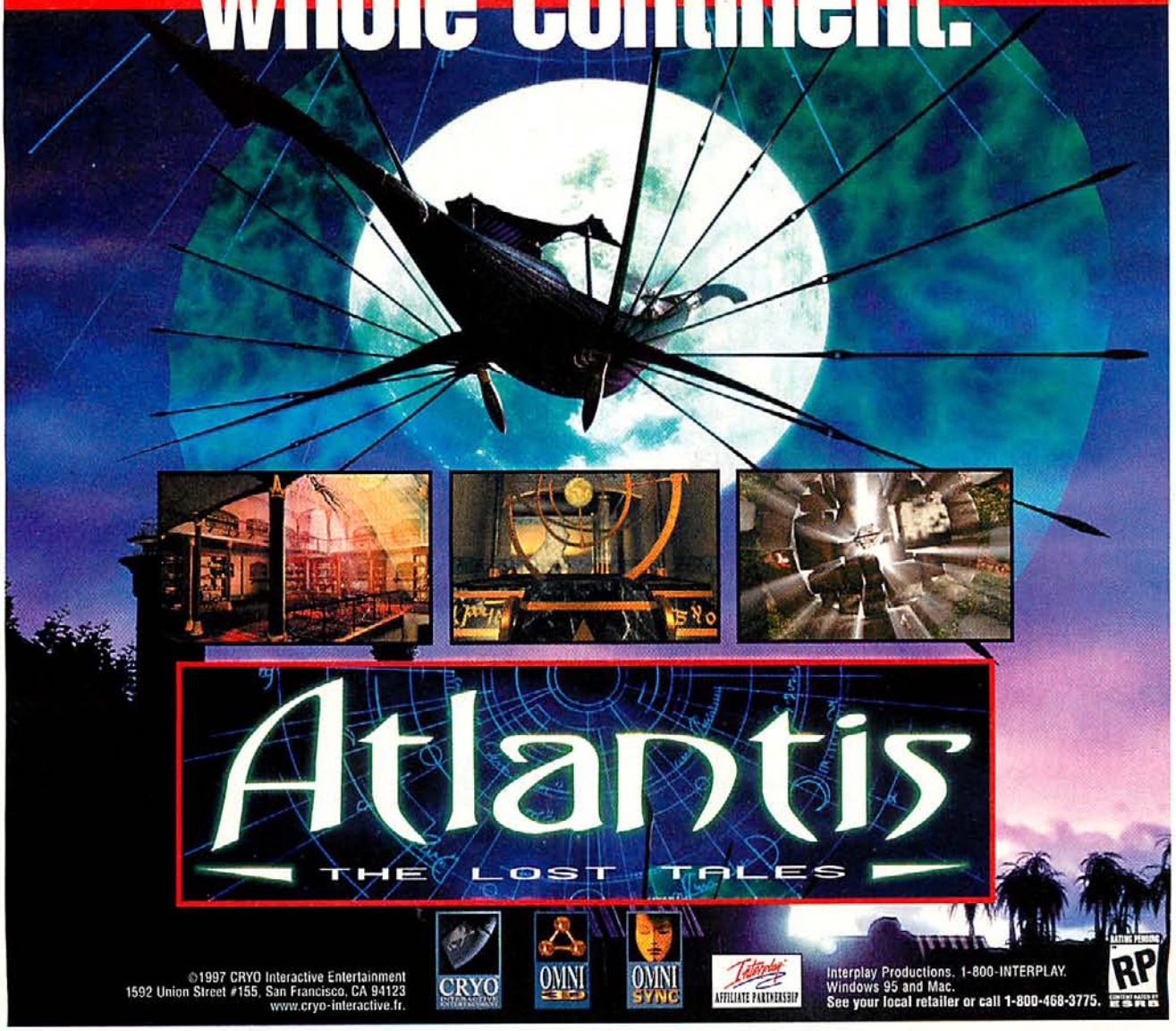
That's about it for this look into the mailbag. Until next time, happy adventuring!

Reach Scorpia at

Email: scorpia@scorpia.com
Internet: Scorpia's Domain at www.scorpia.com
U.S. Mail: (enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you live in the U.S.)

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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #169

CGW TIPS!

Simulation/Space

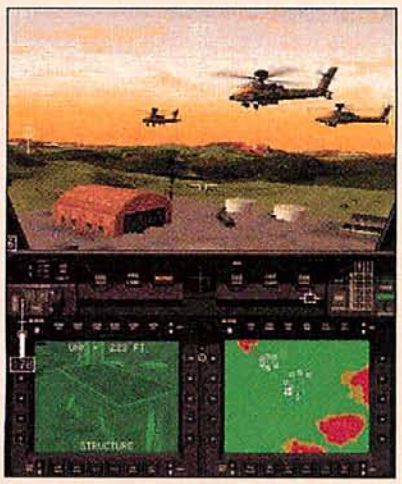
COMANCHE 3

• Although COMANCHE 3 has commendable flight modeling and challenging missions, your teammate (the Army's term for wingman) exhibits an amazing level of stupidity. When you send him to a target, he often seems to lose his instinct for self-preservation and goes for the Kamikaze run.

Of course, you can try to keep him alive by not sending him ahead against targets, but that can be detrimental to your *own* health. It seems that your teammate, Griffon 2-7, not only skipped combat training, but is also oblivious to your existence. If he's behind you and he spots a target in front of you, he'll fire on it—more than likely hitting you instead. So make liberal use of the N key, and go on and send Griffon 2-7 in against the tough targets. His early demise means you'll probably live longer.

• If you're behind Griffon 2-7, be careful not to follow him too closely. He seems to be flying a Super-Comanche that can slice through trees without a scratch. You're not so well-equipped.

• If you're having problems getting smooth response from your helicopter's collective control, use the Options menu to turn off the vertical stabilizer. This will keep your collective values from jumping all over the place.



Action

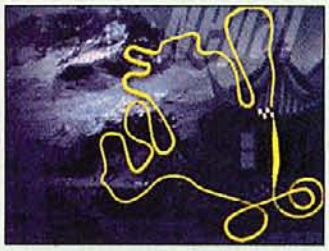
Need for Speed II Cheats

While NFS II might not be the sequel we'd all hoped for, it's still a fun racing game. Here are some codes to unlock secret vehicles.

Type these codes while you're in the main menu.

redracer: Enables Indigo bonus car
bus: Enables school bus
vwbug: Enables Volkswagen Beetle
vwfb: Enables Volkswagen fastback
semi: Enables semi truck cab
miata: Enables Mazda Miata
mercedes: Enables Mercedes-Benz





volvo: Enables Volvo station wagon
bmw: Enables BMW
armytruck: Enables Mercedes Unimog army truck
snowtruck: Enables Mercedes Unimog snow truck
vanagon: Enables Volkswagen combi van
jeepyj: Enables Jeep YJ
landcruiser: Enables Toyota Landcruiser
quattro: Enables Audi Quattro
commanche: Enables Commanche pickup truck

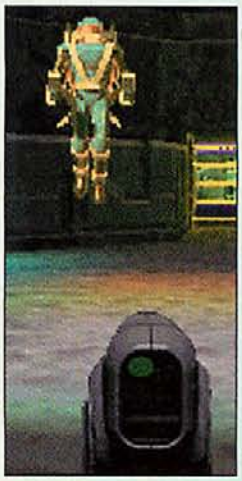
And here is a cheat for a secret track:

hollywood: Enables Monolithic Studios: Hollywood track

REBEL MOON RISING

With a good mix of missions and squad-level gameplay, REBEL MOON is a breath of fresh air in the 3D-shooter category. Here are some cheat codes to help you win independence for the moon. *These codes only work during single-player mode.*

fwmiga = Gives all weapons
fwmarit = Gives health and oxygen
fwwarp01-21 = Warps to different levels
fwbert = Gives jet pack
fwmithra = Gives invulnerability
fwigiveup = Gives win current level and advance level
fwjack = Toggles MMX hooks
fw0, then **fwcount** = Measures frame rate
fwplay01-05 = Plays demos
pf = Captures a screen shot



Sports

FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL '97

The latest patch—now final—has solved a lot of problems with modem play, and renewed interest in this game for online play. Of course, it might also have something to do with the fact that pro football training camps have begun in the real world, and FPS FOOTBALL '98 is still months away...but we digress.

Before you try to emulate your favorite coaches against a human opponent, keep a few things in mind:

Puzzles/Classics

Hoyle Poker Tips

• Our first tip is that you install the hard-drive only version of the game, so that you can listen to your favorite music CD while playing, instead of the inane comments of your computer opponents.



• When you play wild-card saturated games like *Murder*, don't waste your time on a Straight or Flush—the winning hand is almost always a Full House or better, and Five of a Kind hands are common.

HOW TO BEAT AI OPPONENTS:

Anna: Be very conservative; don't call her bluff often.
Bart: Bret Maverick he isn't; squeeze him with small raises.
Elayne: When she winks at you, she's nervous; bluff her.
Kathryn: Good at wild-card, unsteady in standard poker.
Mrs. O'Shea: She's good at stud, lousy at most everything else.
Rick: Scruff-boy is the best of the bunch; play him straight.
Sterling: He's too clever for his own good; call his bluff often.
T-Bone (the dog): Man's best friend bets too much; give him a long leash.



Strategy/Wargames

Heroes of Might and Magic II

One of the most addictive games ever designed, Heroes II requires patience and in-depth strategic and tactical planning to achieve victory.

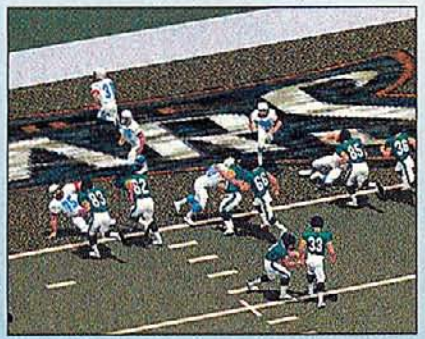
CASTLE DEFENSE

When defending your castle, make sure you've built as many structures as possible and that you've upgraded your mage tower. Your main ballista strikes with the force of as many archers as you have buildings. So, if you've got 10 buildings in your town, your ballista attacks as 10 archers. Your ballistae are then modified for every level of your mage tower. If that same town has a level three mage tower, its ballista attacks as 10 archers with +3 attack. Each turret attacks as half that many archers (thus 5 archers), with the same attack bonus (+3). The maximum power your main ballista could have then is 20 archers at +5 attack. The two turrets would be at 10 archers and +5 attack.

Upgrades do not count, but you get one extra archer each for your castle and mage tower.



• Responding to criticism that FPS Football '96 was too lenient on Agility ratings, the designers downgraded those ratings severely for "non-skill" positions in FPS Football '97. So, make sure that when selecting your team, your linemen have both high Agility and high Endurance ratings. This is particularly crucial for your Center, since he must deal with agile nose tackles and blitzes coming up the middle. So, given the mediocre ratings for Tim Ruddy, you're better off picking a team other than the Dolphins—unless you want to see Marino miss more games than he did in the real NFL.



• One problem in FPS Football '96 was that receivers didn't extend properly, and often had to turn around to catch passes. This meant that "possession receivers" were deprived of their greatest assets: great moves and clutch hands. This problem is fixed in FPS Football '97, so use it to your advantage. Especially in third-down passing situations, an extra slot receiver with Hands rated at 72 or better is a must—especially if he has a Speed of 68 or better, which will often enable him to find seams in your opponent's deep zones.

• One tactic that often works against the computer is to design cornerback blitzes that exploit the gaps between the guard and tackle. Don't try this against an experienced human coach! If he alters his blocking schemes to compensate, you'll soon find that your safeties won't be able to rotate fast enough to cover the hole in coverage left by your blitzing corner.

• Finally, it's sometimes boring, and even cliché, but pick a team with a "banger" running back and a big, obnoxious offensive line, so that you can run the ball consistently. It's worth it just to hear the whining of opponents who can't run their pass-happy attacks for several minutes. Often, your opponent will be so frustrated by lack of offensive activity that he'll try for too much, and maybe even provide you with a gift-wrapped turnover.

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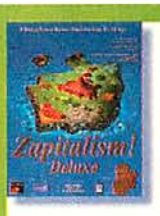
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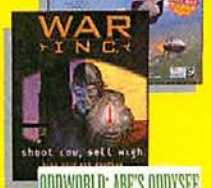
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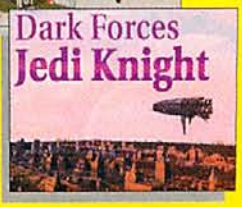
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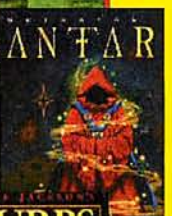
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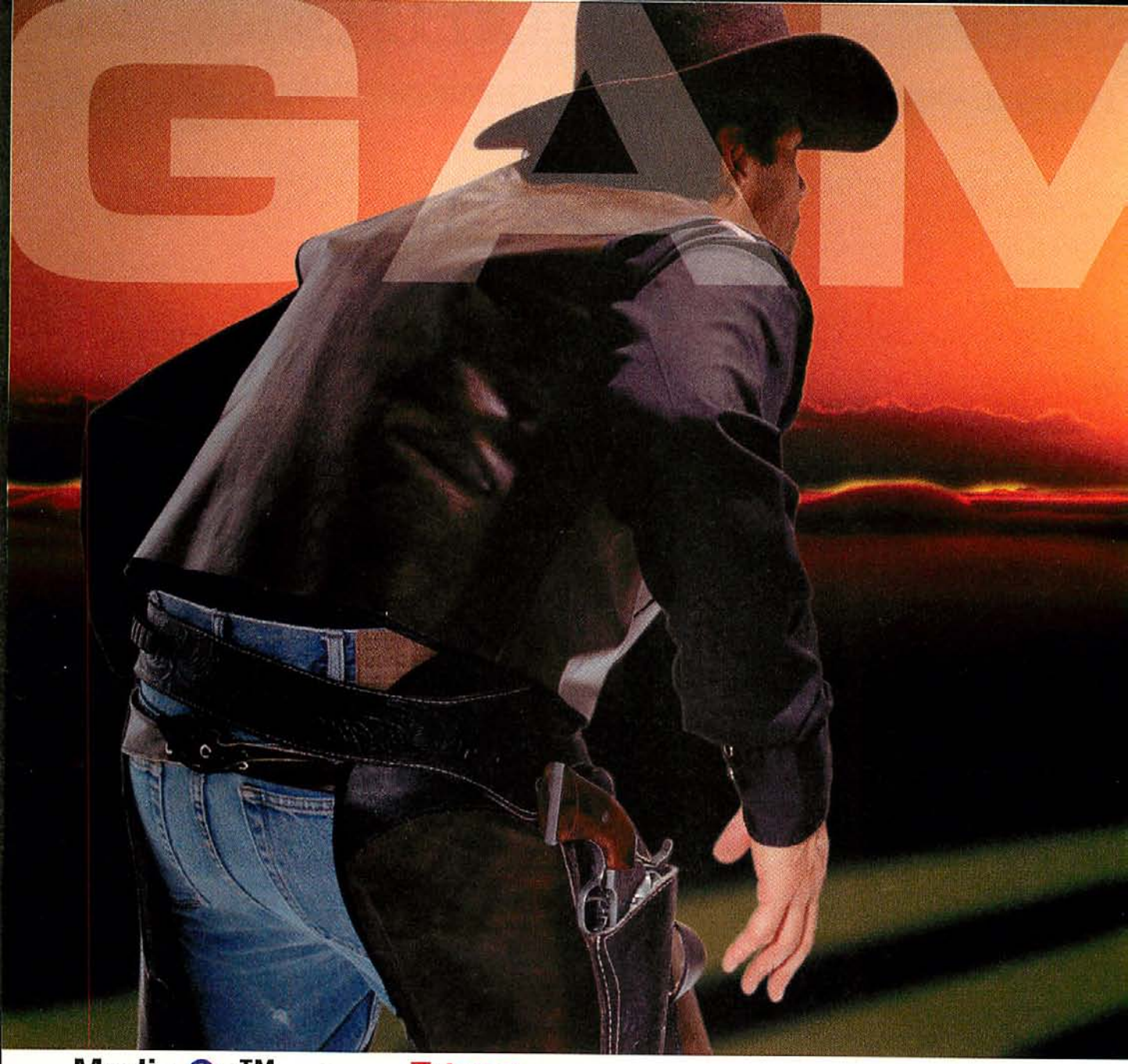
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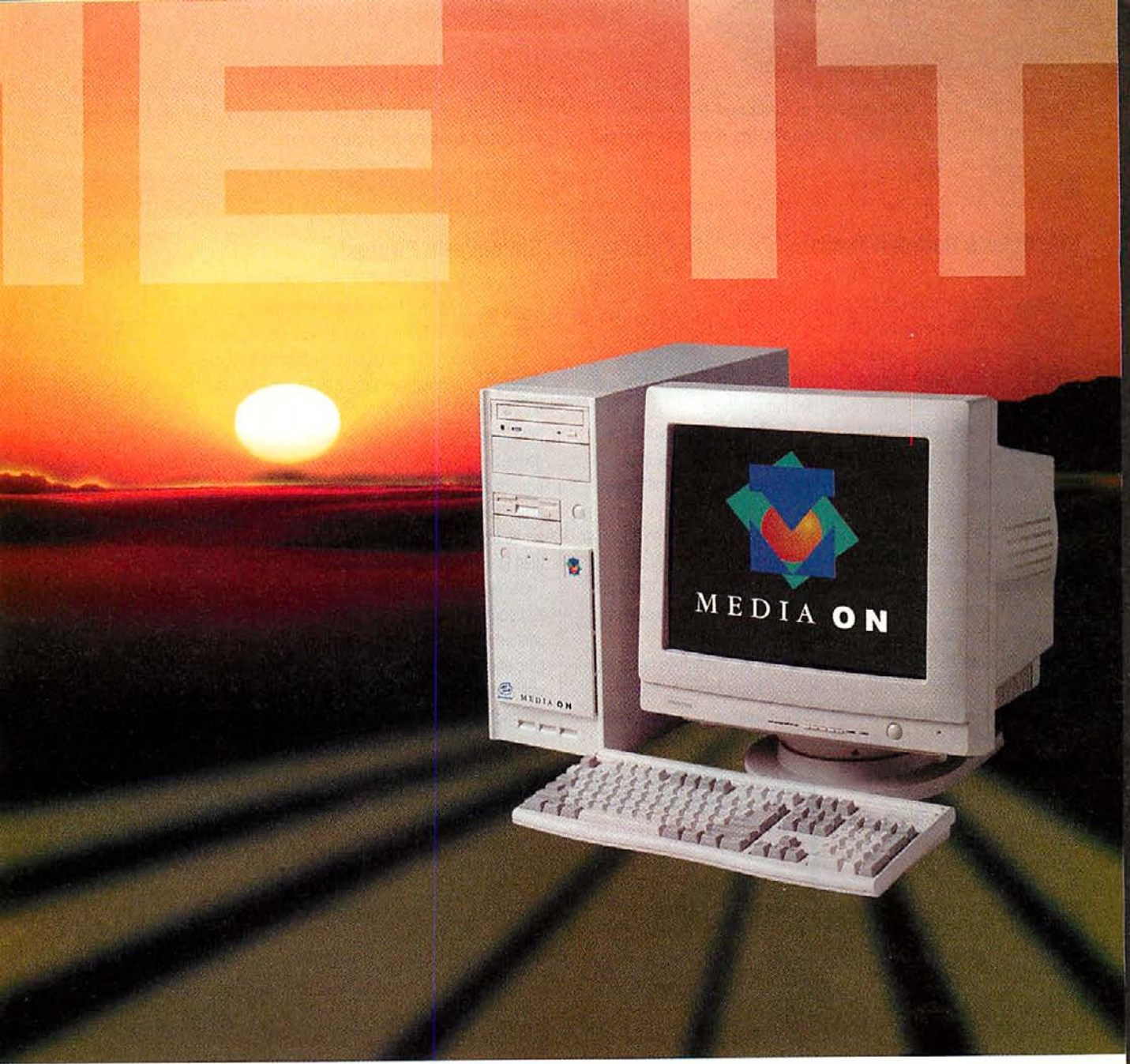
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CIRCLE READER SERVICE #102

Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games. Here you'll find, raised upon pedestals, the games that broke the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

HIGHLIGHTS

Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon

MicroProse, Inc., 1990



Sid Meier, inspired by SimCity, envisioned an accelerated real-time strategy game in which would-be railroad tycoons could test their skills on multiple levels. In Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon, you started with tiled topographical and natural resource maps of North America or Europe. After examining the possible routes and cargoes, you could build an infrastructure of rail lines, rolling stock, support services, and ancillary businesses to exploit the terrain where you were building your system.

The only catch was that the system of interlocking businesses (no Sherman or Clayton antitrust laws here) had to make enough profit to keep AI stockholders interested. If your taste ran more toward the robber baron, it was possible to focus on stock manipulation and speculation. The only disappointment was that the competition was not multiplayer.

If you were more interested in railroad operations, you might have found yourself setting up a series of milk runs and playing for hours primarily as a dispatcher. Most of us found ourselves balancing our capacity for building, investment, and operations in an exciting challenge. By offering the elements of a "software toy" and a game with intense economic competition, Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon proved that it is possible to create both an open-ended *and* competitive game.

Sid Meier's Pirates!

MicroProse, 1987



Sid Meier's Pirates! is one of those games that broke the mold. It debuted on the Commodore 64 and reached its apex in the Amiga version, with its great graphics and Jeff Briggs' soundtrack. At times, it was hard to tell whether it was an adventure game, an action game, or a strategy game. The game required exploration, as you traveled from one port to another in search of enemies and valuable cargo; featured action sequences, as you dueled rival captains and mutinous crew members via horizontal scrolling fencing; and incorporated real-time strategy, as you tried to outmaneuver opposing vessels in tactical combat.

Gamers who liked resource management could handle ship's inventories and pore over virtual charts at their leisure before leaving port, but once the anchor was raised, the game kept moving. Conversation with various governors and functionaries, not to mention the governors' beautiful daughters, was handled via a multiple-choice menu, as were most conversational trees during that era. Sid Meier's Pirates! may well be considered the most successful hybrid game in computer game history.

Inductees Prior To 1989

- **Battle Chess** (Interplay Productions, 1988)
- **Chessmaster** (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
- **Dungeon Master** (FTL Software, 1987)
- **Earl Weaver Baseball** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **Empire** (Interstel, 1978)
- **F-19 Stealth Fighter** (MicroProse, 1988)
- **Gettysburg: The Turning Point** (SSI, 1986)
- **Kampfgruppe** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- **Mech Brigade** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- **Might & Magic** (New World Computing, 1986)
- **M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts, 1983)
- **Sid Meier's Pirates!** (MicroProse, 1987)
- **SimCity** (Maxis, 1987)
- **Starflight** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **The Bard's Tale** (Electronic Arts, 1985)
- **Ultima III** (Origin Systems, 1983)
- **Ultima IV** (Origin Systems, 1985)
- **War in Russia** (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
- **Wasteland** (Interplay Productions, 1986)
- **Wizardry** (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
- **Zork** (Infocom, 1981)

Modern Inductees

- **Alone in the Dark** (I-Motion, 1992)
- **Betrayal at Krondor** (Dynamix, 1993)
- **Day of the Tentacle** (LucasArts, 1993)
- **Doom** (id Software, 1993)
- **Falcon 3.0** (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
- **Front Page Sports Football Pro** (Dynamix, 1993)
- **Gunship** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **Harpoon** (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
- **King's Quest V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
- **Lemmings** (Psygnosis, 1991)
- **Links 386 Pro** (Access Software, 1992)
- **M-1 Tank Platoon** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **Master of Magic** (MicroProse, 1994)
- **Master of Orion** (MicroProse, 1993)
- **Panzer General** (SSI, 1994)
- **Red Baron** (Dynamix, 1990)
- **Sid Meier's Civilization** (MicroProse, 1991)
- **Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon** (MicroProse, 1990)
- **The Secret of Monkey Island** (LucasArts, 1990)
- **Their Finest Hour** (LucasArts, 1989)
- **Tie Fighter** (LucasArts, 1994)
- **Ultima VI** (Origin Systems, 1990)
- **Ultima Underworld** (Origin Systems, 1992)
- **Wing Commander I, II, & III** (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
- **Wolfenstein 3-D** (id Software, 1992)
- **X-Com** (MicroProse, 1994)

Computer game programs have grown so massive, and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge, that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common.

Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs. New patches are in red.

A-10 Cuba! V1.2: Faster frame rates, better messaging and better joystick controls are but a few of the improvements to keep you in the air longer. *Beware:* This works only if you have the previous 1.01 patch installed!

Age of Rifles V1.4: Commanders may now name play-by-email files and go into combat with greater confidence that the dreaded system freeze enemy will not harass their flanks. For other fixes, be sure to reconnoiter the exhaustive READ.ME file.

Age of Sail V1.05: Bow/stern chasers no longer reload after being destroyed. There are also improvements to the ship repair rules.

AH-64D Longbow Gold V1.04: Fixes movie player and garbled speech problem for the *gold* version of this Jane's combat sim only.

Air Warrior II V1.01a: For better multiplayer furballs.

Battleground Shiloh V1.1: Winner of *CGW*'s best wargame is improved even more by this latest upgrade, which includes AI tweaks and more realistic casualty rates.

Broken Alliance V1.02: Latest upgrade for HPS Simulations' add-on to PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS.

Civilization II Scenarios V1.1: Mostly tweaking to balance scenarios and to stiffen the challenge of this commendable add-on pack.

Daggerfall V1.07.213: Another welcome patch for Bethesda's award-winning RPG.

Diablo V1.03: Dungeon delvers of all persuasions will benefit from this upgrade. No longer can illegal spells be cast in town, and this patch ends duplicate item generation at the Blacksmith and Witch within the same game. Game speed, latency, and packet loss issues over the Internet are also much improved.

Dragons in the Mist V1.01: Patch in the Pacific, WWII.

Harpoon Classic '97 V1.63d: The latest Win 95 executable to make your favorite fleet more seaworthy.

Ghost Bear's Legacy V1.1: Mechs will now move through their normal range of motion using various rudder pedal input devices. Joystick throttle commands should work as well.

iM1A2 Abrams for Win 95 V1.10: New treads for Interactive Magic's tank simulator.

Interstate '76 V1.06: More than a dozen fixes make this the hippest, baddest multi-melee around—especially since the host no longer gets double kills, and "partial deaths" are no more.

Magic The Gathering V1.1: Better AI, sound, and animation are but a few of the fixes in MicroProse's version of the Wizards of the Coast classic.

MechWarrior Mercenaries V1.06: Regardless of clan affiliation, all will benefit from this latest upgrade, which repairs more 'mech deficiencies.

Master of Orion II V 1.31: This latest in galactic technology evidently repairs much of the damage to the diplomacy model, as well as adding an initiative-based system for ship combat. There is a separate upgrade file available in German.

MDK Video Patches: If you thought the mayhem was merry before, wait until you see the SVGA carnage with these new patches for 3DfX and Rendition-based cards!

NCAA Championship Basketball: NEC Systems with Alliance Pro Motion Video Cards that are experiencing lock-ups will find this more refreshing than a 30-second timeout.

Outlaws V1.1: The new 3DfX support makes this faster on the draw than Jesse James.

Privateer 2 The Darkening: Since the movie is the best part of the game, it's nice that this patch solves most of the video difficulties.

US Navy Fighters '97 V1.3: You'll fly faster with fewer 3D complaints. This also enables dogfights over TCP/IP.

X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter V1.10: Your fighters now handle better than a wet womprat in an ice storm on Hoth during multiplayer games.



▶ Check for new patches on the demo disc.

ZDNet

Patches can usually be downloaded from online networks (such as CompuServe and ZDNet), from *CGW*'s Web site (**www.computergaming.com**), or from the individual software publisher's Web site (see listing below).

Publisher Web Sites

Many patches are available from the publishers at the following sites:

Accolade: www.accolade.com
Activision: www.activision.com
Apogee/3d Realms: www.apogee1.com
Avalon Hill: www.avalonhill.com
Bethesda: www.bethsoft.com
Big Time Software: www.bigtimesoftware.com
Blizzard: www.blizzard.com
Eidos: www.eidos.com
EA: www.ea.com
Epic MegaGames: www.epicgames.com
HPS Simulations: www.hpssims.com
Id Software: www.idsoftware.com
Interactive Magic: www.imagicgames.com
Interplay: www.interplay.com
Jane's Combat Simulations: www.janes.ea.com
LucasArts: www.lucasarts.com
MicroProse/Spectrum HoloByte: www.microprose.com
Microsoft: www.microsoft.com
New World Computing: www.nwcomputing.com
Origin: www.origin.ea.com
Papyrus: www.sierra.com/papyrus
Sierra On-Line: www.sierra.com
SSI: www.ssionline.com
Talonsoft: www.talonsoft.com
Virgin: www.vie.com

THE COMPUTER GAMING POLL • A MONTHLY SURVEY OF *CGW* SUBSCRIBERS

Each month, 2,000 *CGW* subscribers are selected at random to rate 100 computer games. The results of that poll are combined with the results of previous months to yield a cumulative average for the best plays in gaming. If you receive a ballot, please return it with your ratings so that other gamers and game publishers can benefit from your feedback.



TOP ACTION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Quake Pack 1: Scourge of Armagon	id Software/Hipnotic	9.32
2	Tomb Raider	Eidos	8.40
	Duke Nukem 3D	Apogee/3DRealms	8.40
4	Interstate '76	Activision	8.16
	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	8.16
6	The Need for Speed SE	EA	8.11
7	Quake	id Software	8.03
8	Crusader: No Regret	EA/Origin	7.89
9	Outlaws	LucasArts	7.84
10	The Need for Speed	EA	7.56



TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Pandora Directive	Access	8.39
2	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	8.30
3	Rama	Sierra	7.94
4	The Neverhood	Dreamworks	7.74
5	Spycraft	Activision	7.60
6	Circle of Blood	Virgin	7.56
7	Full Throttle	LucasArts	7.52
8	Lighthouse	Sierra	7.47
	Leisure Suit Larry 7	Sierra	7.47
10	Zork Nemesis	Activision	7.27



TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	You Don't Know Jack II	Berkeley Systems	8.22
2	You Don't Know Jack Sports	Berkeley Systems	8.19
3	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	8.18
4	Power Chess	Sierra	7.28
5	Mind Grind	Microforum	7.27
6	Incredible Toons	Sierra	7.23
7	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	7.06
8	Monopoly	Virgin/Westwood	6.90
9	Baku Baku	Sega	5.98
10	Trivial Pursuit	Hasbro	5.23



TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	8.42
2	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	8.24
3	MechWarrior 2	Activision	8.20
4	AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	8.13
5	X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	8.12
6	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	7.90
7	Silent Hunter	SSI	7.88
8	EF2000	Ocean	7.71
9	Flying Corps	Empire	7.59
10	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	7.58



TOP SPORTS GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Links LS	Access	8.69
2	Nascar 2	Sierra	8.32
	NBA Live '97	EA Sports	8.32
4	NHL '97	EA Sports	8.29
5	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	8.17
6	Triple Play '97	EA Sports	7.62
	Nascar Racing	Sierra	7.62
8	FPS Football Pro '97	Sierra	7.58
9	NHL Hockey '96	EA Sports	7.54
10	FPS Football Pro '96	Sierra	7.50



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	WarCraft II Expansion Disk	Blizzard	8.89
2	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	8.83
3	WarCraft II	Blizzard	8.82
4	Heroes II	New World Computing	8.81
5	Civilization II	MicroProse	8.77
6	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	8.34
7	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	8.30
8	Civilization II: Scenarios	MicroProse	8.18
9	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	8.02
10	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	7.91



TOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Diablo	Blizzard	8.80
2	Daggerfall	Bethesda	7.48
3	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	7.22
4	Albion	Blue Byte	6.15
5	—		
6	—		
7	—		
8	—		
9	—		
10	—		



TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	8.69
2	Steel Panthers II	SSI	8.51
3	Steel Panthers	SSI	8.43
4	Battleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	8.12
5	Battleground: Antietam	TalonSoft	8.08
6	Tigers on the Prowl 2.0	HPS Simulations	7.83
7	Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	7.70
8	Battleground: Gettysburg	TalonSoft	7.53
9	Robert E. Lee: Civil War General	Sierra	7.34
10	Age of Sail	TalonSoft	6.94

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★ 1	Quake Pack 1: Scourge of Armagon	id Software/Hipnotic	AC	9.32
★ 2	WarCraft II Expansion Disk	Blizzard	ST	8.89
3	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.83
4	WarCraft II	Blizzard	ST	8.82
5	Heroes II	New World Computing	ST	8.81
★ 6	Diablo	Blizzard	RP	8.80
7	Civilization II	MicroProse	ST	8.77
★ 8	Links LS	Access	SP	8.69
★	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	8.69
10	Steel Panthers II	SSI	WG	8.51
11	Steel Panthers	SSI	WG	8.43
★ 12	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	SI	8.42
13	Tomb Raider	Eidos	AC	8.40
	Duke Nukem 3D	Apogee/3DRealms	AC	8.40
★ 15	Pandora Directive	Access	AD	8.39
16	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.34
17	Nascar 2	Sierra	SP	8.32
	NBA Live '97	EA Sports	SP	8.32
19	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.30
	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	AD	8.30
21	NHL Hockey '97	EA Sports	SP	8.29
22	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	SI	8.24
★ 23	You Don't Know Jack II	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.22
24	MechWarrior 2	Activision	SI	8.20
25	You Don't Know Jack Sports	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.19
26	Civilization II: Scenarios	MicroProse	ST	8.18
	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.18
28	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	SP	8.17
29	Interstate '76	Activision	AC	8.16
	Crusader: No Remorse	EA/Origin	AC	8.16
31	AH-64 Longbow	EA/Origin	SI	8.13
32	X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts	SI	8.12
	Battleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	WG	8.12
34	The Need for Speed SE	EA	AC	8.11
35	Battleground: Antietam	TalonSoft	WG	8.08
36	Quake	id Software	AC	8.03
37	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.02
38	Rama	Sierra	AD	7.94
39	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	ST	7.91
40	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	SI	7.90
41	Crusader: No Regret	EA/Origin	AC	7.89
42	Silent Hunter	SSI	SI	7.88
43	Outlaws	LucasArts	AC	7.84
44	Tigers on the Prowl 2.0	HPS Simulations	WG	7.83
45	The Neverhood	Dreamworks	AD	7.74
	Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games	Sir-Tech	ST	7.74
47	EF2000	Ocean	SI	7.71
48	Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	WG	7.70
49	Triple Play '97	EA Sports	SP	7.62
	Nascar Racing	Sierra	SP	7.62

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
51	Spycraft	Activision	AD	7.60
52	Flying Corps	Empire	SI	7.59
53	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	SI	7.58
	FPS Football Pro '97	Sierra	SP	7.58
55	Lords of the Realm II	Sierra	ST	7.57
56	Circle of Blood	Virgin	AD	7.56
	The Need for Speed	EA	AC	7.56
58	Pro Pinball	Empire	AC	7.55
59	NHL Hockey '96	EA Sports	SP	7.54
60	Battleground: Gettysburg	TalonSoft	WG	7.53
	MDK	Playmates/Shiny	AC	7.53
62	Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	7.52
63	FPS Football Pro '96	Sierra	SP	7.50
	Privateer 2	EA/Origin	SI	7.50
65	NBA Live '96	EA Sports	SP	7.49
	Fantasy General	SSI	ST	7.49
67	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	SI	7.48
	Daggerfall	Bethesda	RP	7.48
69	Lighthouse	Sierra	AD	7.47
	Larry 7	Sierra	AD	7.47
71	Warbirds	ICI	SI	7.46
72	F-22 Lightning II	NovaLogic	SI	7.45
73	Jack Nicklaus 4	Accolade	SP	7.44
	FIFA 97	EA Sports	SP	7.44
75	CivNet	MicroProse	ST	7.43
	PGA Tour Golf 486	EA Sports	SP	7.43
77	Tony LaRussa 3 '96	Stormfront Studios	SP	7.42
78	Magic The Gathering	MicroProse	ST	7.36
79	Robert E. Lee: Civil War General	Sierra	WG	7.34
80	M.A.X.	Interplay	ST	7.32
81	Power Chess	Sierra	CP	7.28
82	Road Rash	EA	AC	7.27
	Mind Grind	MicroForum	CP	7.27
	Zork Nemesis	Activision	AD	7.27
	Toonstruck	Virgin	AD	7.27
86	Incredible Toons	Sierra	CP	7.23
87	Descent II	Interplay	AC	7.22
	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	RP	7.22
89	Missionforce Cyberstorm	Sierra	ST	7.21
	Virtual Pool	Interplay	SP	7.21
	Syndicate Wars	EA/Bullfrog	AC	7.21
92	System Shock	EA/Origin	AC	7.19
93	Jetfighter III	Mission Studios	SI	7.17
94	Terra Nova: Strike Force Centauri	Looking Glass	AC	7.14
95	Hexen	id Software/Raven	AC	7.09
96	Magic Carpet 2	Bullfrog	AC	7.08
97	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	CP	7.06
98	Legends of Kyrandia 3	Virgin/Westwood	AD	7.04
99	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	AD	6.99
100	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	SI	6.98

Games on unnumbered lines are tied with game on line above. ★ = Top game of type. Red = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role-Playing, SI = Simulation/Space Combat, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.



What's the Deal with...Killing Reality?

The "Psycho Geeks" column was fairly predictable, with no support for the Wreckers or Cheaters, and many, many tales from ex-DIABLO and MUD players stating how the psychotic, self-esteem-damaged Killers had made their favorite game pointless. The handful of rabid letters from Psycho Geeks defending their right to kill other players in games not really intended to foster murderous rampages was also predictable, but what *was* a surprise was the outrageous pretension in their logic.

To hear these guys go on, you'd think that sneaking up behind somebody who is busy fighting a troll and then stabbing them in the back is as important to the cause of human freedom as being a co-writer of the Constitution. These self-proclaimed champions see themselves as the driving force of realism in online RPGs.

Guess what? It's time to stop getting off the bus at the corner of Delusional and Insipid.

First of all, let's state again that the angry majority of the online (and sadly, the ex-online) community sees PKing as a random act of idiotic violence that has little, if anything, to do with what is going on in the game. Pretentious PKers always seek to drive the argument into all-or-nothing territory, which is patently ridiculous and a surefire way to make sure nothing changes in their little worlds. The issue is not whether players should be "allowed" to kill each other. Instead, it's a matter of what steps game administrators have to take to keep their RPGs from spiraling into pathetic sub-versions of DOOM, where a few people get to play and the rest of the players get to be moving targets—with new players constantly replacing old players who get sick of the BS and quit.

The ULTIMA ONLINE folks have stated that they are in favor of player-to-player violence that adds to the environment, and for the most part, I agree with them. I mean, if I'm sitting in a virtual bar and a Dwarf walks up to a table of Orcs and says, "Hey, aren't you from the clan that wiped out my village?" I'll be more than happy to duck and start laying bets on who'll survive. I'll even go as far as saying there is no harm in walking along a country road and having a guy pop out demanding my stuff or my life. These are all the things petty and violent that make High Fantasy so much wholesome fun, and most gamers really don't consider this to be PKing.

> **"It's time to stop getting off the bus at the corner of Delusional and Insipid."**

On the other hand, some little goof sputtering, "Your broadcasts are too loud. I am going to kill you, dude!" or running around trying to kill as many lower-level players in one night as he can, is not exactly the next installment of the *Small Kitchen Implements of Shannarra*. And it is exactly the kind of crap that will keep online RPGs utterly marginalized as a form of entertainment.

Oh, do I hear the tedious cries that say that players doing everything and anything they want is the essence of RPGs? Excuse me? Do you have a clue what the letters RPG stand for? I'll give you a hint; they don't stand for Really Pathetic Guy (or Gal) taking out their frustrations on other players—the ones who are actually trying to role play! The only game that the behavior of most PKers actually fits into would be LORD OF THE FLIES 2—A NEW BEGINNING. Have any of you people actually thought about what the concept of an RPG is? Have you considered that there are concepts being played out that are more important than pumping up your ego to make up for your boss/parents/teachers treating you like a moron?

Given PKer logic, most of the great works of fantasy literature would have been three or four pages, tops. Let's see...instead of defeating the dragon, Bilbo Baggins is killed while he's taking out the garbage by some rabid adolescent with a fireball spell. Thomas Covenant is stabbed in the back and tossed off the World Cliff by a young woman who wishes she could assert herself in real life. Oh yes, and the grand and powerful Witches of Darkover are killed from behind, while fighting their true enemy, by a sad 30-year-old guy who is angry because they won't have cybersex with him.

Ahhh yes, that's real role-playing for you!

You PKers want to be the champions of reality? Try having enough bloody imagination to start a war where stuff is destroyed forever! Or better yet, be really brave and push for a game where death has real implications, and see how enamored of it you are. How many PKers would be thrilled with a game that erased characters when they died, and had towns where, if you were caught killing another player at random, you were tossed in a cell and then faced a trial by your peers—where "guilty" meant that you were banished from the server for 5–10 years?

Not so eager for reality now, eh?

There is no doubt that rabid PKers will continue in their petty ways. I just wish that they would be honest about it, and admit that they are afraid to play a game where violence is expected, and that they have no concern at all (beyond self-gratification) for the reality, well-being, or value of the RPG community they prey upon.

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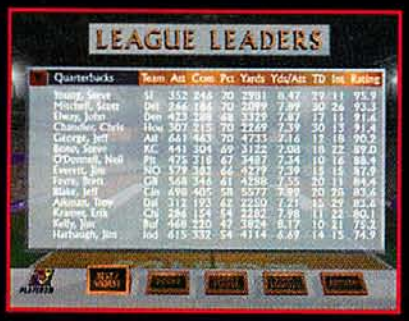
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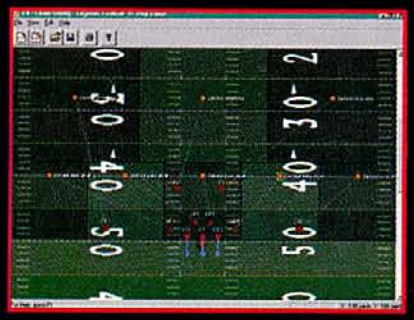
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1932

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1950

- Rules favor the running game.
- Goal posts were placed in the front of the end zone. The "Post" pattern was commonly used to run defenders into the posts for an easy touchdown reception.



1968

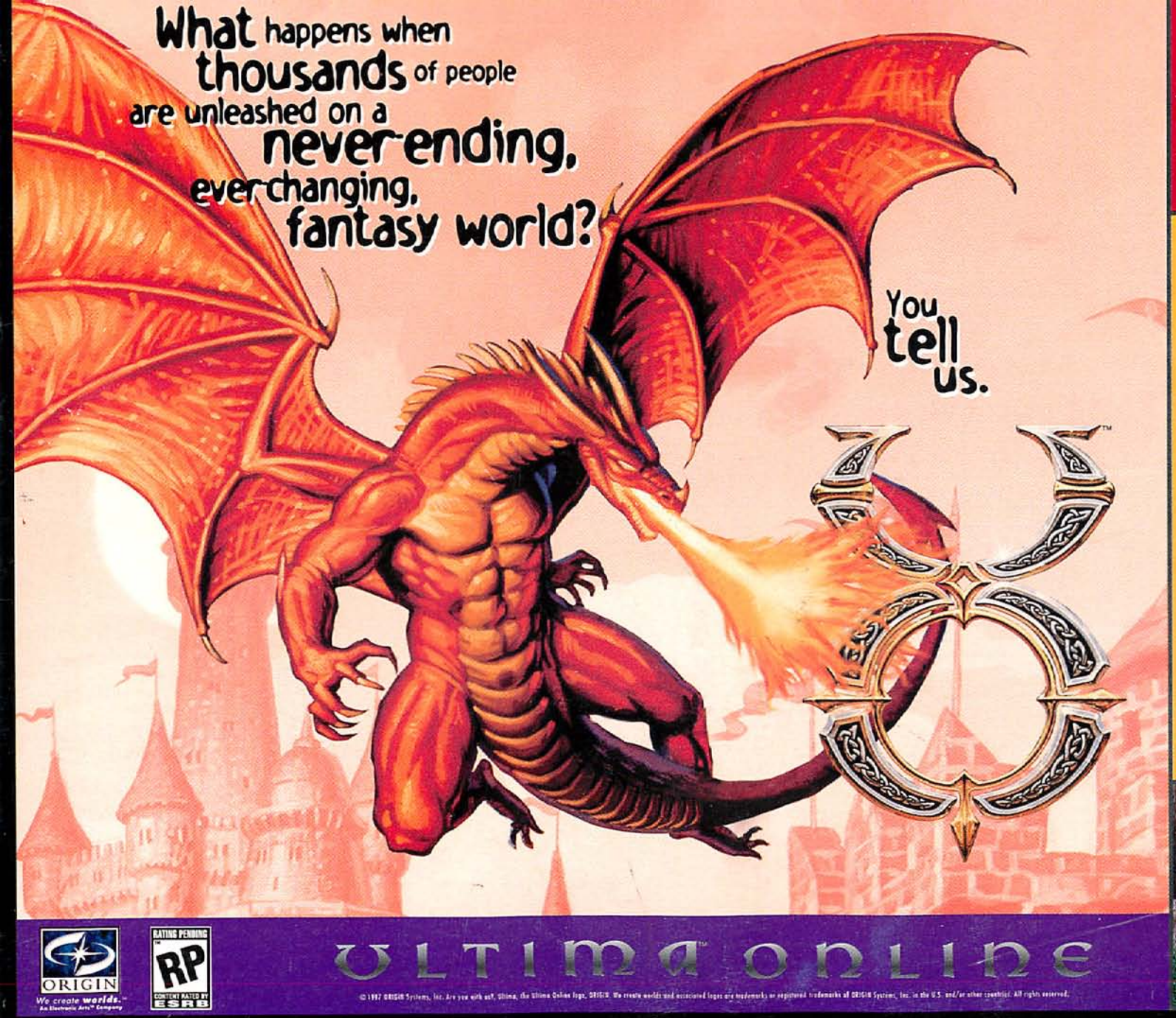
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